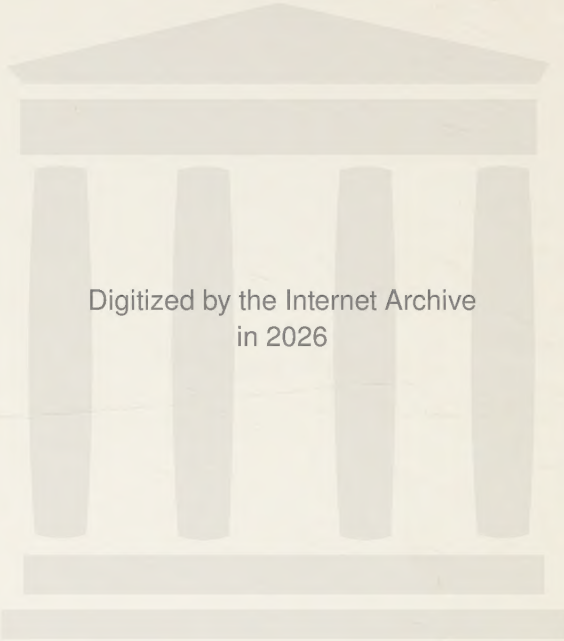




Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

To mother

With Best Wishes

from Lizzie

Xmas. 1930.

BRACKEN AND THISTLEDOWN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FLOWER O' THE HEATHER
BRACKEN AND THISTLEDOWN
THE ADVENTURE OF DEATH
THE ADVENTURE OF LIFE
THROUGH FLOOD AND FIRE
O ROWAN TREE

BRACKEN AND THISTLEDOWN

BY ROBERT WILLIAM MACKENNA

AUTHOR OF

"FLOWER O' THE HEATHER," "THE ADVENTURE OF DEATH"
"THE ADVENTURE OF LIFE," "THROUGH A TENT DOOR"

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

FIRST EDITION . . .	September 1923
Reprinted . . .	December 1923
Reprinted . . .	December 1924
Reprinted (3/6) . . .	May 1926
Reprinted (2/-) . . .	March 1927
Reprinted (3/6) . . .	October 1928

TO
MY WIFE

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE TRAGEDIES OF LIFE . . .	1
II. JAMES BURNIE, SHOEMAKER . .	22
III. "AS THE AULD COCK CRAWLS THE YOUNG ANE LEARNS" . . .	70
IV. GIVING THE DEVIL HIS DUE . .	87
V. THE CHIEF OF SINNERS . . .	100
VI. "MASTER IN HIS OWN HOUSE" . .	117
VII. "MANY WATERS CANNOT QUENCH LOVE" .	130
VIII. MAISIE'S TOKEN . . .	148
IX. WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES . .	182
X. PETER STRANG FINDS HIS SOUL . .	193
XI. "THIS LITTLE PIG WENT TO MARKET" .	208
XII. SAM'L DELAP TURNS DOCTOR . .	220
XIII. KIRSTY LEARMONT . . .	251
XIV. THE STORY OF WILLIE SPROULE . .	262
XV. TWO OLD SOLDIERS . . .	297

GLOSSARY

de'il's-buckie	•	imp of Satan
dour . . .	•	hard, stern
ether . . .	•	adder (pronounced like heather without the aspirate)
feckless . . .	•	useless, spiritless
gang forrit . . .	•	(colloquial) meaning to go forward to partake of Holy Communion
gane gyte . . .	•	gone mad
gleg . . .	•	quick, smart, clever
glower . . .	•	to look frowningly
greet . . .	•	to cry, weep
gully . . .	•	a large knife
hoast . . .	•	cough
keek . . .	•	to look, or peer
kenspeckle . . .	•	recognisable
kittle (adj.) . . .	•	serious
lug . . .	•	ear
luif . . .	•	palm of hand
muckle . . .	•	much, big, great
pech . . .	•	pant
rax . . .	•	strain
saft sawder . . .	•	flatter
sib . . .	•	like
smeddum . . .	•	strength, vigour, backbone
smittle . . .	•	infectious
sonsie . . .	•	comely, buxom
stott . . .	•	to bounce
straik (a scythe) . . .	•	to sharpen
thrang . . .	•	busy
trig . . .	•	neat
wale . . .	•	choose
whangs . . .	•	leather laces
whitruck, whittrit		weasel
win there . . .	•	succeed in getting there

BRACKEN AND THISTLEDOWN

I

THE TRAGEDIES OF LIFE

IN the room above the stable at Drumwhat on an evening in June, two young men sat on the top of the large wooden "kist" that stood at the foot of the bed. They were Matthew Gloag, the "single man" of Drumwhat, and Bob Halliday, who filled the same humble but onerous position at Acre-end. Both were sturdy fellows. Matthew was the elder by some six months, and the taller. He had a bullet-shaped head, with large fleshy ears, a blunt nose, and bovine, simple eyes. His hair was black and disarrayed. Bob, though the shorter of the two, was the more powerfully built. His red hair had a curl in it—the lure of more than one lassie's eye. His ears were close-set against his rounded head, his eyes were never fully opened—except in the dark—and his powerful arms were so long that when he stood erect he could touch his knees. He spoke through his teeth—so that his mildest words sounded a little savage.

Both young men were clean-shaven—that is

to say, they had been on the previous Saturday night in preparation for the Sabbath. But as it was now the middle of the week, their cheeks and chins bristled with stubble like a cornfield when the reaper has passed.

In the large spade-like palm of Bob lay a brass buckle which shone brightly as he turned it this way and that. Matthew, whose right hand held a polishing leather, and on whose left knee rested a small round tin half filled with some black substance, was leaning forward eagerly gazing at the shining object.

"Did ye ever see onything as bricht as that, Bob?" he asked.

Bob held the buckle up that the light might fall on it at a better angle.

"Man, Mattha!" he said, "it's like goold. Whit did ye mak' the polish oot o'?"

"Oot o' ma ain heid, Bob. There's nocht like it on the market."

"I dinna think there is!" said Bob appreciatively. "It's by-ordinar."

"An' beside a' its ither advantages," said its proud inventor, "ma paste has this tae be said for't, that, being black, it disna mak' a mess o' the harness like a white or a pink polish does."

"That's a guid point, Mattha'. It shud sell weel."

"I'm howpin' sae! There'll be a lot o' siller in a discovery like mine."

"There wull that!" said Bob a little enviously. "Ye'll be as rich as Andra Carnegie."

“An’ what for no?” asked Matthew, who was already beginning to dream dreams. “He never invented ocht hissel’.”

For a moment neither spoke. Both were seeing visions of untold wealth. Then Matthew asked:

“Hoo many horses dae ye think there are in the Universe, Bob?”

Bob did a lightning calculation—thinking aloud through closed teeth: “There’s fowre pair at Acre-end, but only seeven sets o’ harness; there’s three pair at Harleyknowe; fowre pair at Drumwhat; fowre pair at Tullyreoch; six pair at Laigh Kirton—besides Peter Strang’s powney at Dalbean, an’ the miller has an auld mear—that’s forty-fowre we ken aboot, an’ Dalbean’s no’ a big place.” He paused and completed his calculation in silence; then he spoke with an air of profound wisdom, the hedge of his teeth lending strength to his words:

“In the hale Universe, includin’ Dalbean an’ Ameriky, there micht be a hunner thoosan’ horses.”

“Guidsakes!” said the astonished Matthew. “Dae ye think there’s as mony as that?”

“There micht be three or fowre pair that I haena allooed for—but I should say a hunner thoosan’ will no’ be far oot.”

“Weel!—even suppose there’s only ninety-nine thoosan’ sets o’ harness, I can see masel’ a very rich man.”

“An’ whit wull ye dae wi’ a’ yer siller?”

asked Bob, who already saw his friend Matthew oozing gold at every pore.

"I haena had time tae think o' that properly. I've been owre thrang bringing the paste tae perfection, but whan I'm as rich as Andra Carnegie I'll leave the ploo—I'm tired o't—an' I'll maybe buy ye a meerschaum pipe."

"In a case, like the young maister's?" asked Bob eagerly, "wi' Bobbie Burns's heid carved on the bowl?"

Matthew nodded. His own generosity had taken his breath away, and rendered him, for the moment, speechless.

"It's the prood man I'll be," said Bob, as he rose to his feet.

Matthew stretched out his hand for the buckle, then rose and, opening his kist, hid the buckle and his precious polishing paste under his "Sabbath claes." Then he locked the box carefully, giving a vicious tug to the hanging padlock to make certain that all was secure.

"Weel!" said Bob, "I'll be takin' the road hame. I like tae be bedded afore ten."

"I'll gi'e ye a convoy," said Matthew, as he picked up his cap.

The two men came down the stone staircase built on to the outer wall at the gable-end of the stable, and together took the road for Acre-end. They walked heavily, in silence. Matthew was deep in thought, trying to visualise ninety-nine thousand sets of harness, and his own potential wealth. Bob was engaged on a diffi-

cult problem in mental arithmetic. How many tins of polishing paste would Matthew need to sell before he got his meerschaum pipe with Bobbie Burns's head carved on the bowl?

Matthew was getting heated. He pulled out a large red handkerchief on which was printed, in fading yellow, a map of Scotland with "The Rotation of Crops" in the top left-hand corner, and a list of the Kings of Scotland in the bottom right, ending with "James VI of Scotland and I of England." He wiped his perspiring brow on the Grampian Hills, and blew his nose against the Mull of Galloway and the Solway Firth.

An owl, like a ghostly shadow in the dim light, floated past on noiseless wings. Both Matthew and Bob saw it, but said nothing. They were still deep in reverie. Suddenly a little shrill death-cry pierced the quiet air. It was a sound that to their accustomed ears spelled tragedy—the sacrifice of some small creature of the fields. Both men stopped, and listened for a moment, but the cry was not repeated. As they fell to walking again Bob spoke:

"Aye!—life's fu' o' tragedy: juist ae thing preying on anither."

"That's a fact! it is so," replied Matthew, brought suddenly back to reality out of his dreams of gold.

"Umphm!" said Bob, at a loss for a more expressive word. "Did I ever tell ye about my tragedy?" asked Matthew, a sudden desire to confide in his friend descending upon him.

"No, Mattha!—ye never did."

"It had tae dae wi' a wumman," said Matthew sadly.

"That's often the case," answered Bob. "Tell me about it."

It was an hour when confidences become easy. Matthew began to unburden himself.

"It was maybe three year sin', afore I cam tae Drumwhat. Her name was Bella Montgomery, but we'll ca' her Aggie Smith, an' then ye'll no ken wha she was. I'm no the man tae gie a wumman awa'."

Matthew sighed, and paused for a moment while Bob waited expectantly.

"It was the time o' the hairst; I was cutting the corn, an' she was bindin' for me. There were maybe five mair men wi' scythes in the fiel', an' we were a' followin' ane anither at a distance, cuttin' as we went. Weel! whan I stopp'd tae straik the scythe she pit the band roon the last sheaf, an' cam' an' stood beside me. 'Ye cut a graun' sheaf,' says she, an' I began tae think she maun be a sensible lass. So I looked at her.

"'Aye, Bella!'—I mean Aggie—says I—'dae ye think sae?' An' as I looked at her I thocht I had rarely seen sic a bonnie, sonsie, souple lass. An' a sensible ane as weel by the way she talked. But I never let on. So I took tae the cuttin' again an', as ye can weel imagine, I did ma very best—for when a bonnie lassie's lookin' at the sma' o' yer back it behoves ye tae pit yer best

fit forrit. I was fair pechin' whan we got tae the top o' the fiel'.

"Weel! by an' bye the cairt cam' up frae the hoose wi' the scones, an' the cake, the cheese an' the buttermilk, an' juist by accident as it were I fand masel' sittin' behin' the same stook as her whan we took oor refreshin'. We didna talk muckle—for it's bad mainners tae talk tae a lass whan yer mooth's fu'—an' she seemed a wee blate; but there was twa things that pleased me about her. First, she borrowed ma knife and scraped the rind off her cheese—lots o' lassies wad hae cut it off, sic wasters they are—an' I made a note o't, for I thocht if I ever needed a wife I'd want a thrifty ane. And then she asked me tae tak' a thistle-jag oot o' her finger. That pleased me mair than ever, for I thocht she's willin' tae trust her life tae me, an' me wi' a knife in ma haun'.

"Did ye ever tak' a thistle-jag oot o' a lassie's haun', Bob?"

"No! I never did," answered Bob, envy in his tone. "Nae lass ever askit me."

"Maybe," said the self-satisfied Matthew, "that's because ye haena got my way wi' the wimmen. I've aye thocht ye were a bit gosh wi' them."

"Get on wi' yer story, Mattha," answered Bob, and he spat viciously at the hedge through his teeth.

"Weel, whan we yoket tae again, I thocht a lot, an' I kept watchin' Bella—I mean Aggie—oot

o' the corner o' ma e'e. There's nae nicer sicht in a hairvest fiel', Bob, than a sonsie, souple lass bindin' the sheafs: mair especially if she's makin' guid money, is thrifty, an' kens a man whan she sees ane."

Bob coughed suddenly, and Matthew looked at him suspiciously.

"Whit are ye hoastin' at: are ye catchin' the cauld?" he asked.

"I dinna think sae, Mattha'—but somethin' was kittlin' ma throat. Get on wi' yer story; I'm takin' it a' in."

Reassured, Matthew picked up the broken thread:

"Weel, I turned it a' owre in ma min', Bob, for whan ye're dealin' wi' a wumman ye should dae naethin' hasty—but whan the day's wark was bye I says tae her: 'Bella,' says I—I mean Aggie—'wull ye come wi' me tae the Fair on Wednesday?'

"She looked at me, an' her bonnie broon face went a bit reid; an' then she lauched an' said:

"'Think ye kindly, Mattha', I micht dae waur.' An' whan I thoct o' the ither men that had been scythin' in the same fiel' I agreed wi' her. Ye see, Bob, she was a lass wi' some judgment."

By this time they were within a hundred yards of their destination, and the white gable of Acre-end gleamed ghostly in the moonlight. The two men stopped, and stood for a moment pawing the ground like a pair of restless horses, then

they turned and began to retrace their steps to Drumwhat. That is the fashion in which we "convoy" each other in Dalbean: we arrive ultimately, but our progress is not always direct.

"An' what happened at the Fair?" asked Bob.

"Gie me time, man!" said Matthew. "I hate tae be hurried," and he produced his gaudy handkerchief again and wiped his brow on the Lesser Cumbraes.

"Weel," he continued, "I met her at the road-en' on the Wednesday morning at half-nine, an' I can tell ye she looked bonnie. She was trig an' sonsie, an' I min' she had blue corn-floors in her hat." Matthew stopped suddenly, and gave a gulp. Bob hit him with the flat of his heavy hand between the shoulders. Matthew started, and growled, "Whit made ye dae that?"

"I thocht ye was chokin', Mattha'," said Bob apologetically.

"So I was, Bob, but no wi' onything that a slap on the back could shift; I was chokin' wi' emotion. Man, Bob!"—and Matthew gulped again,—“I can never look at thae wee blue floors noo-a-days withoot wantin' tae greet. They aye mak' me think o' my tragedy.”

Matthew took a moment or two to recover his composure, then he went on:

"So we took the road for Whinburn. There was lots o' ither lads and lassies on the road as weel, but I didna see a lass that could haud a

caunle tae Bella—I mean Aggie. She was as bricht as a lintie—talkin’ awa’ a’ the while—a lot o’ silly nonsense. I didna say muckle masel’. Ye see, Bob!” and Matthew stopped and laid a heavy hand on his companion’s shoulder to drive the warning home, “whan ye’re oot wi’ a lass by yer lane ye’ve got tae watch yer tongue. It’s easier tae commit yersel’ than tae get oot o’t—so a sensible man like me is aye carefu’.”

“I unnerstaun’,” said Bob.

“Weel, by an’ by we got tae Whinburn, an’ whan we cam’ tae the High Street it was fu’ o’ fowk. I never saw sae mony fowk in ma life, an’ I noticed mair than ane takin’ a lookin’ at Bella—I mean Aggie—an’ I could read the thocht in their min’s. They were thinkin’ ‘What a bonnie lass! an’ sic a weel-set-up young man she’s wi’!’—but I never let on.”

Bob coughed again; and Matthew looked at him quickly, but so far as he could discern Bob looked as solemn as though he were in the kirk. Matthew’s voice sank almost to a whisper.

“Man, Bob!” he said, “whan ye tak’ a lass tae the Fair yer money juist rins through yer fingers like watter. We hadna been twa meenutes in the High Street till Bella—I mean Aggie—began tae develop the maist extravagant notions. Ye ken yon wee stottin’ ba’s—a’ covered wi’ goold—on a bit o’ elastic. Weel, there was a man stannin’ wi’ ane fit on the kerb,

sellin' them oot o' a tray, an' Bella—I mean Aggie—was nayther tae haud nor bind till I had bocht ane for her. Tippence it cost—sheer robbery!—for whan she had got it she fastened the 'lastic roon her finger, an' began stottin' the ba', an' wull ye believe it, at the very first try the 'lastic broke, an' the ba' flew intae the gutter an' rolled doon the drain. It was a terrible shock tae me, Bob. Tippence gane—doon the drain like watter—an' naething tae show for't, an' Bella—I mean Aggie—never turnin' a hair: she juist lauched. I could see I was in for an awfu' day, Bob."

Matthew took a long breath. Bob preserved a discreet silence.

"We gaed on up the street, an' then naething wad satisfy her but I maun buy her a 'snap-man.' But I pit ma fit doon firmly. 'It's bad for the disgeester', says I—an' whan she still wad hae ane I thocht I wad break her off it by makin' her lauch; so I says, 'Ye've nae need o' a snap-man, Bella, whan ye've got a rale man like me.' An' that worked it, for she lauched an' slipped her arm through mine, an' said, 'Come awa' doon tae the shows.' It was juist then I saw Hamish Wilson, the single-man at Tullyreoch, glowerin' at us. There was an angry glint in his e'e—an' I knew he was jealous that I had sic a bonnie lass haudin' ma airm. Hooever, we pushed on—an' cam' doon tae the grun' whaur the shows was—an' what a day we had! Naething wad content her but a swing in

the swing-boats, an' twa three rides on the merry-go-roun's, wi' a steam whustle blawin' in yer lug fit tae deeve ye. An' efter that there was Pepper's Ghost, and the Wild Beast Show, an' the Wild Man o' Borneo, an' she had tae see them a'. No that I minded muckle, for I got a bit o' enjoyment oot o' that bit o't masel'; but the man wi' the milky cokey-nuts nearly broke ma hert. Ye ken the thing—"Three ba's a penny: an' every time ye knock it doon ye git a milky cokey-nut"—I can hear the blackguard shoutin' it yet in ma dreams.

"Weel! I bocht three ba's for her; but the wumman that could hit a barn-door whan she's aimin' at it has yet tae be born; an' she missed every time. Hooever, naething wad satisfy her but she maun hae three mair ba's, and three mair efter that, an' I can tell ye I was in a cauld sweat, for I wad hae been ruined if ma naitral common sense hadna saved me; so I says, 'Aggie, if ye throw ony mair ye'll rax the spine o' yer back'; an' she minded Andy Bissett, an' took fricht."

"An' did she hit naething ava?" asked Bob sympathetically.

"Wi' her last ba'," answered Matthew, "she took aim richt at the middle ane; but the ba' flew oot o' her haun', an' hit the showman sic a crack on the heid. That was the only cokey-nut she struck the hale day," said Matthew grimly, "but she didna knock it aff—worse luck! She only made the man sweer, maist blasphemious. So that was an extra excuse for takin' her awa',

lest her min' shud be corrupted. Ye see she was only young."

"Ye maun hae had an awfu' time!" said Bob.

The two men stopped. The chimney-pots of Drumwhat were in sight. Bob turned on his heel, and Matthew followed him—the "convoy" was still in progress.

"Weel! efter that," resumed Matthew, "we took a daunner roon' the show-grun', an' had a look at a lot mair o' interesting things frae the ootside. There's a lot o' things tae be seen at the shows for naething—an' we saw them a'. An' then we cam' tae a stall whaur a man was sellin' meat pies—fine big juicy anes, fu' o' meat (there was ane cut across, lying on a plate tae let ye see how weel filled they were). So as I was feelin' hungry I bocht ane for masel' an' took a bite o't. 'Aggie,' says I, 'it's awfu' guid, ye should buy yersel' ane'—for though I was ready enouch tae pey for her fun I wasna prepared tae pey for her feedin'."

"An' what did she say?" asked Bob eagerly.

"She was a sensible lass—in spite o' her extravagance at ma expense—an' she took ma advice, an' bocht ane."

The promised meerschaum pipe "wi' Bobbie Burns's heid carved on the bowl," which, during Matthew's tale of prodigal expenditure had receded from the realm of possibility into a nebulous territory "at the back o' beyont," began to take shape again. Hope was reborn in

Bob's breast. "Mattha had been saved thrupence for a pie," that was the thought in Bob's mind, and there would therefore be threepence less to accumulate before he was as rich as Andra Carnegie.

"Weel! at lang last," resumed Matthew, "the awfu' day o' godless extravagance an' riotous leevin' cam' tae an en', an' we took the road hame. Aggie—I mean Bella—was awfu' quate—an' I didna dae muckle speakin' masel', for a' the time ma haun' was in ma pooch tryin' tae coont hoo muckle I had spent on her. I took her quateness for repentance—an' ye min' frae the Catechism repentance is a sair job, so I left her tae it. But I looked at her aince or twice, an' man, in the gloamin', she looked bonnier than ever. An' ma hert gaed a big loup, an' I kent I was beginnin' tae like her again. So I thocht the maitter owre, an' I says tae masel', 'Mattha', says I, 'she's a sonsie lass, an' a guid worker. She can earn guid money, an' she'll mak' ye a guid wife, an' aince ye're mairrit tae her ye needna tak' her tae the Fair ony mair.' It was a consolin' reflection, Bob; so when we cam' tae the Barnslaps Plantin' I says, 'Bella'—I mean Aggie—'we'll tak' a short cut through the wud.' An' I helped her owre the stile, an' man, whan I grupped her airm I kent I was heid owre heid in lave wi' her. But I says tae masel'—'Mattha', lad,' says I, 'ca' canny. Dinna commit yersel' owre sune'—an' I walked ahint her along the wee path,

admirin' her sonsie shape an' the soupleness o' her, but keepin' ma tongue ticht behin' ma teeth."

Matthew paused, and gulped noisily. Bob looked at him, and beat a tattoo on his knee-caps with his broad fingers.

"I've heard tell, Mattha'," he said, "that in luve an' in war it's the bold man that wins."

"Ach! haud yer wheesht an' let me get on wi' ma story. Weel, as I was sayin', we cam' tae a spot in the plantin' whaur the path broadened oot, an' we could walk side by side, an' then something cam' owre me, an' I slipped ma airm roon her an' I made tae kiss her. But she bounced awa' frae me like a stottin' ba'."

"'Nane o' yer impidence,' says she, an' she catched me sic a crack on the lug I thocht I'd been kicked by a horse.

"'Bella!' says I, nursing ma lug wi' ma haun', 'whit dae ye mean?'

"Her e'en were fair bleeczin'. 'Dae ye no' ken,' she cried, 'I'm promised tae Hamish Wilson?'

"Bob, lad," and Matthew laid his hand on Bob's arm, "ye could hae knocked me doon wi' a rash. Her promised tae Hamish Wilson! an' throwin' ma siller aboot like watter! 'Then what for,' says I, angry like, 'did ye lead me on tae tak' ye tae the Fair? What for did ye tak' ma airm in the High Street? I thocht ye liket me.'

"She lauched. The Jezebel lauched—an' her had wasted sae muckle o' ma siller. 'Mattha',' says she, 'ye're a fule. I let ye tak' me tae the Fair an' I took ye by the airm in the High Street tae spite Hamish. We fell oot a fortnicht sin', but he's gaun tae mairry me a' the same—I'll see tae that. He's had his heid oot o' his nose-bag lang eneuch; he'll be eatin' oot o' ma haun' the morn.'

"An' wi' that she lauched again—a fair skirl—an' raced awa' like a hare, an' left me stannin' in the plantin' nursin' ma lug."

The moment was one that demanded some expression of sympathy, and Matthew waited for it, but none came. Instead, Bob spat sibilantly through his closed teeth. So Matthew took up the tale once more:

"So I made ma wey hame by ma lane, sair an' sorry, an' whan I got back tae the laft I coonted up a' she had cost me, an', wull ye believe it, I had spent twa shillin' an' fivepence on the thenkless hizzy. As a maitter o' fact I was twa shillin' an' fivepence ha'penny short, an' I'm awfu' bothered aboot that bawbee. I canna accoot for't, unless a pick-pocket took it."

Bob's promised meerschaum pipe disappeared over a very distant horizon. He decided to give it up as irretrievably lost; yet he was sympathetic enough to say:

"Twa-an'-fivepence, Mattha'! what a lot o'

siller, an' naething tae show for't—no' even a milky cokey-nut!"

"No, naething," answered Matthew sadly. "Naething but an' awfu' sair lug."

Acre-end was once more in sight, so the two turned again like Dick Whittington, and walked a hundred yards in utter silence. Then Matthew spoke:

"Bob," he said, "I agree wi' Solomon whan he said in the Buik, 'there's nae sic thing as a guid wumman.'"

"I dinna min' him pittin' it exactly like that!" said Bob.

"Weel, maybe no; but that's what he meant, an' I agree wi' him. He ocht to ken, wi' a' yon wimmen aboot him."

"That's whaur I disagree wi' ye, Mattha'. Solomon was sic an' auld rip that nae self-respectin' wumman wad hae onything tae dae wi' him—so he only kent bad anes an' he ca'ed them a' bad."

"Dinna be blasphemious, Bob!" said Matthew sternly.

Bob took the reproof without a word, and the two walked on. Every now and then Matthew muttered under his breath—"Twa-an'-fivepence! the Jezebel! Twa-an'-fivepence!—what a tragedy!"

Suddenly Bob interrupted him. He too had a tale to tell.

"Mattha'," he said, "my tragedy's far tragicker than your tragedy."

"What!" exclaimed Matthew, "I never kent ye had a tragedy. I thocht I was the only man in the Pairish o' Dalbean wi' a tragedy. Yours can be nocht tae mine!"

"Oh aye, it is—far tragicker!" retorted Bob.

Matthew, vexed that his friend should challenge his pride of place, did not speak, so Bob continued:

"Hae ye never noticed hoo disjacket I aye am the hale month o' May?"

"I canna say I hae," said Matthew, his curiosity awakened.

"Weel, I am. Richt doon disjacket so that I sometimes hae tae lauch tae keep ma hert up. For whan ye're proper disjacket ye want tae lauch, juist as whan ye're rale happy ye want tae greet."

This insight into the psychology of his race was lost on Matthew, who trudged on in silence.

"An' hae ye never noticed that I aye wear a black cravat on the Sabbath day in that month?" asked Bob, amazed that the question should require to be put.

"I canna say that I hae," repeated Matthew.

"Weel! ye maun be blin'! Are ye shure it was the lug an' no' the e'e that Aggie hit ye on?"

Matthew looked viciously at Bob, but the savage sound of his words, as Bob forced them through the hedge of his teeth, made him shrink from picking a quarrel.

"It was ma lug richt eneuch," he said, and he put his hand over it affectionately as though it still stung. "What for dae ye aye wear a black cravat on the Sabbath day that month?"

"Because it's a sad month for me—fu' o' tragick memories: I can never rise abune it."

"Had it tae dae wi' a wumman?" asked Matthew.

"No. No' wi' a wumman wi' a horse."

"That's bad!" said Matthew.

"Aye! awfu' bad. I'll never get owre it. Ye see I went tae the races at Whinburn in the month o' May, an' I pit a hale shillin' on a horse."

Matthew gasped at the extravagance. This was even worse than "three balls a penny" with the elusive hope of a "milky cokey-nut" dazzling before one's eyes.

"Aye!—a hale shillin'; but I stood tae win a poun', for the backin' was twenty tae ane against the horse."

"Bob!" said Matthew sternly. "Ye're a wild gambler. Dae ye ken whaur gamblers gang tae?"

Bob paid no attention to the reproof, but went on:

"An' the horse won—by hauf a heid."

"Guidsakes!" said Matthew. "So ye won a poun'! The horse maun sae been a graun' runner!"

“Aye!—there’s the tragedy. The horse was a graun’ runner; but the man I backed wi’ was a graun’ runner tae! He ran awa’ wi’ ma poun’!”

If the welsher who had robbed this honest Scots ploughboy of his winnings could have heard the viciousness with which Bob forced his words through his clenched teeth, he might well have walked in fear of his life for the rest of his days. But, being a “graun’ runner,” and having had three years in which to make good his escape, he was already far enough away.

Bob sighed deeply. “Aye,” he said, and there was tragedy in his tone.

“Umphm!” said Matthew, “life’s fu’ o’ tragedy—juist ae thing preyin’ on anither. Twa-an’-fivepence,” and he put his hand over his ear again.

“My tragedy’s far tragicker than your tragedy!” hissed Bob.

Matthew said nothing—but the two turned again in their tracks and began to retrace their steps.

They walked for twenty minutes longer, speaking not at all. The tragedy of life was weighing them both down.

Sometime about midnight the water watcher, hidden in a clump of bracken on the bank that sloped down from the road to the river—his eyes and ears alert for poachers—heard them part. They were midway between Drumwhat and Acre-end.

He heard two groans—a muttered word that, sounded like “tragick,” and then their farewell :

“ Weel, guid nicht, Mattha’ ”—“ Guid nicht Bob ! ”—thank ye for seein’ me hame ! ”

II

JAMES BURNIE, SHOEMAKER

I

FOR twenty-five years Jamie Burnie had been a byword in Dalbean for miserliness. In that small community, where thrift was a virtue, a sharp line was drawn between legitimate economy and unwarranted parsimony, and on the far side of the line Jamie lived, a pariah. His name passed into our common speech: he was immortal while he still had being.

“Dinna try the Jamie Burnie on me!” was a stinging rebuke to anyone who sought to drive too hard a bargain. The protest usually resulted in an easing of terms: though it left soreness behind.

Jamie was the village cobbler. An “in-comer,” he had succeeded to the business—what there was left of it—established by Davie Hyslop, who had taken a short-cut to the kirk-yard by way of the public-house. Jamie came on the scene in answer to an advertisement. A tall, gaunt man of forty, he looked older than his years, for there were lines on his face that had not been graven by Time. His grey eyes were sad and tired, but the set of his mouth was firm,

though not unkindly. He had a broad and high brow, and the head of a thinker. Being tall, he stooped as he entered the shop door, though it was high and more than wide enough to let him in easily. He drove a hard bargain with the widow.

"But ye've nae books tae show the turn-over!" he said.

"Na! But there's nae opposition," she replied.

"Oh, aye, there is. I've heard tell that the drucken weys o' yer man drove a lot o' the best custom tae Whinburn."

With the corner of her apron Mrs. Hyslop wiped a pretended tear from each side of her shiny nose. In his lifetime she had proclaimed her husband's evil ways to Dalbean with many shrill protestings; but her wifely pride was hurt that a stranger should seek to make them an excuse for refusing to be fleeced.

In the end Jamie got the business at his own figure—two pounds more than the value of the stock-in-trade. He refused to pay a penny for good-will.

"I'm no' gaun tae pay for what's no' there," he said. "But I'll gie ye twa pounds forbye the value o' the stock if ye'll get oot at aince."

The bargain was closed on these terms.

Mrs. Hyslop, with the purchase money in her pocket, confided her troubles to Dunlop, the smith.

"I'm surprised at ye, Mirren! The business

was worth mair nor that. Ye should hae bided a wee. He was only the first offerer."

"Aye! An' the only ane," she answered.

"Weel," he replied, "if ye've pit yer haun' tae it, it's owre late tae greet aboot it; but, Mirren, if ye blame Providence for the loss o' Davie, though the hale o' Dalbean kens he had a finger in that pie himsel', ye've naebody but yersel' tae blame for the loss o' the business."

Three months later Mrs. Hyslop—lonely without her noisy and neglectful husband—tempted Providence once more by marrying a cotman at Harleyknowe. The flower of Hope grows radiantly in a woman's heart, and she a widow. She lived long enough to regret and to paint in reminiscent words of tenderness "puir deid Davie."

So Jamie Burnie became the cobbler of Dalbean.

Dalbean does not take strangers to its heart readily. It studies them with searching eyes, it weighs them in the balance of its own self-esteem, it measures them by the standard of its own prejudices, and, this done, it may admit that the intruder is "no half bad." Further than that meagre praise it will not go. An "in-comer" must live in Dalbean for a generation before he is regarded as "ane o' oorsel's"—but he is not readily allowed to forget that this title is one of courtesy and not of birth. Dalbean watched critically, but the cobbler made no advances. From the first he kept himself to

himself, outside of business hours. If he met them on the road he would return the greetings of the folk in a friendly enough way; but he held himself aloof from their lives. More than one of Davie Hyslop's cronies, believing from Davie's example that cobbling must be a thirsty trade, tried to persuade his successor to join them in the Blue Bell. But the cobbler always declined.

"I've something better tae dae wi' my siller," he would say.

In the sanded kitchen of that hostelry, and in the "smiddy," the ways of the "incomer" were passed under review.

"He's no' social-like," said Willie Shed. Mair than aince I hae drappin' on him i' the forenicht for a crack, meanin' tae tak' his measure; but he never asks ye ben the hoose. He'll keep ye staun'in' in the shop, and he never as muckle as speirs if ye've a drouth tae slocken."

"Are ye tellin' us?" came in chorus.

"Did ye hear aboot him an' Peter Strang?" asked Jamie Kerr. "He went intae Peter's shop an' asked for a poun' o' tea. Peter pit a poke on the scales, and was for fillin' the tea intil't, but the cobbler stopped him. 'I'm no peyin' for paper,' says he, an' he glowered at Peter till he weighed the tea lowse."

"An' whan he gangs tae the kirk he pits a ha'penny in the plate," said Bob Dickie, who, being an elder, had an opportunity of noting

the generosity of the congregation, with face averted, but eyes aslant, "an' if there's a special collection he aye stops awa'."

"Aye! he's gey close-fisted I doot, but they tell me he's a guid cobbler," said the smith, eager to pay tribute, as one craftsman should, to the honest work of another.

That he was master of his trade Dalbean soon learned. No boots were ever repaired with such thoroughness in Davie Hyslop's time. Davie brought to his work a cheerful optimism begotten of his latest dram. "It'll dae fine!" was his complacent remark as he surveyed each job he completed; and sometimes he saw stitches where there were none, or admired as a perfect piece of work a patch which many of the stitches had missed altogether. But the new cobbler was skilful and work-proud. In his way he was an artist: and the honesty of his handiwork soon earned approval. His patching was thorough: every stitch in its right place, and the patch so carefully cut and trimmed as to be inconspicuous; while his soles and heels, of well-tanned durable leather, could be relied upon to resist the wettest of farm work. And he never handed a pair of boots across the little counter of his shop without making a final and complete examination of them through his big spectacles to see that all was right.

When asked what his charge might be Davie Hyslop had often hiccoughed—"I leave it tae yersel'"—and thereby frequently received more

than the job was worth. But the new cobbler knew the quality of his work and made his customers pay for it. Some of them demurred at first.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Brown. "That's as muckle as I'd pay in Whinburn at ane o' the big shops."

"As like as no'," replied the cobbler, "an' there ye'd be payin' a first-class price for second-class leather and second-class work. Here ye're getting the best; an' ye can either pay for't or leave it."

"Weel, ye'll maybe throw in twa pair o' whangs."

"Aye! an' I'll maybe no'. The price a'm chairgin' leaves nae room for luck-pennies."

A man's every-day acts and his habitual traits etch his character upon the minds of those who have dealings with him, and though no large meanness could be laid to the charge of the cobbler, his close-fistedness and his petty parsimonies won for him the reputation of extreme miserliness.

"He's awfu' near the bane," or "He's an auld screw," or, "He's mean eneuch tae pu' a hen's teeth," were the verdicts of Dalbean.

His reputation spread beyond the country-side. In the leather-merchant's office in Glasgow the junior partner was reporting to his senior the results of his tour among the country shoemakers. "I've secured some very satisfactory orders," he said, and the senior partner, with

the list before him, nodded his head. "But I've come across a queer character in Burnie, the cobbler at Dalbean. He's been a customer for years, but this is the first time I've called upon him. When I introduced myself he said: 'You're the very man I want tae see. I'm weel eneuch satisfied wi' the quality o' yer leather, but the price is far owre high.' I protested that our prices were cut as fine as possible, and I quoted him our tariff for leather of the second grade.

"That wunna dae for me,' he said. 'I maun hae naething but the best. I maun think o' my guid name.'

"Well,' I answered, 'leather is leather; and our second quality is quite reliable; but if you will have the first grade, you must pay for it.'

"Weel,' he answered, 'I'll just warn ye that I'm transferrin' my custom tae Ingram and Brodie unless ye can mak' some allowance. I'm no' askin' ye tae cut the price o' yer leather, but ye micht throw in five gross o' leather whangs, a gross o' mohair laces, an' ten poun' o' tackets forbye eneuch thread tae serve me for a twal-month.'

"I protested that this was an unheard-of and impossible gratuity; but he insisted. I booked his order for leather conditionally, and as I left him he added: 'Them's my condections. If you an' yer pairtner wunna agree I tak' ma custom elsewhere; but mind ye' ye're no tae

tak' the discoont oot in the quality o' the leather. First class or naething.' ”

The junior partner turned over the pages of a ledger, and the two men scrutinised their account with the cobbler for the past five years.

“ The amount is not great,” said the senior partner, “ but I see he always pays promptly ; and from what you tell me he takes a pride in his work. We'd better humour him. Ingram and Brodie are pushing their way among the country cobblers, and it's better policy to keep a friend than make an enemy.”

So for the rest of his life Jamie Burnie got most of the accessories of his trade as a free gift. He examined each consignment of leather carefully, and put it to many searching tests to assure himself that his “ luck-penny ” had not been extracted from its quality. But the leather merchants played fair with him, and he never had reason for complaint.

To his daily task the faithful workman may bring a devotion that less honest folk sometimes expend in religion. The materials of his craft may acquire in his eyes the value of things sacred. Thus it was with the cobbler, as more than one customer learned.

A maid from London, in attendance on her mistress—a visitor at the Castle—brought to him one day a pair of dainty shoes which, designed for the smooth pavements of the city, had succumbed rapidly when put to the test by our rough roads.

"I should like you, Mr. Burnie," she said, in her pretty English way, "to mend my shoes. Your roads here are terrible."

Jamie took the proffered shoes and examined them critically. Then he pushed his spectacles up over his eyebrows and looked at the girl.

"Oor roads are bad eneuch, but they're naething tae yer shoos. They're juist paper!"

The girl's face fell. They were very dainty shoes; the footman had admired them.

"Oh! Mr. Burnie," she cried, "I'm sure you're wrong. They cost a lot of money, and I bought them at a swell shop in London."

"Nae doot! nae doot!" he answered, "an' they've robbed ye, lassie! See here"—and with his strong thumb-nail he split a flake from the edge of the sole—"it's naething but broon paper."

That a mere village cobbler should dare to speak in such terms of the productions of a west-end shop, seemed almost like sacrilege to the girl.

"I'm sure you're mistaken, Mr. Burnie," she protested. "But I'll be very much obliged if you'll mend them for me; and please put on thin soles. I want to look neat."

"I'm sorry, lassie," said Jamie. "I daurna touch them," and he held out the shoes to her.

The girl misunderstood him. She imagined that, accustomed as he was to the heavy footwear of the country-side, he shrank from under-

taking a job that called for a light hand and dainty workmanship.

"Oh! I'm sure you could if you tried," she protested.

There was a harshness in his voice as he answered: "Aye, I could if I would; but there's a principle in the maitter! I daurna affront guid leather by stitching it on tae paper."

The girl, puzzled and somewhat vexed, took her shoes with a haughty toss of her head.

Up in the wood the following Sunday she retailed her experience to the footman, as they sat together on the trunk of a fallen tree. It was her woman's way of directing the attention of a somewhat laggard swain to the daintiness of her feet and the trimness of her ankles.

"He was positively rude to my pretty shoes," she said, and thrust them out for the admiration of her lover.

"The sulky bear! These Scots are a huneducated lot," he answered as he slipped a welcome arm round her.

Jamie had come to Dalbean a hale man in middle life. The five-and-twenty years he lived among us were strenuous years of toil, and they took their toll of his strength. At sixty-five he was an old worn man. The darkness of his hair had turned to silver grey. Under his deep-set eyes his sallow skin lay wrinkled, and on each side a tortuous vein crawled like a snake from the furrows on his forehead across the sunken pit of his temples into the thicket of his hair.

He had kept himself apart from the life of the village, and the village had left him to the loneliness of his own choosing. But he had friends. The blacksmith's shop and the cobbler's are the paradise of children, and whenever Jamie's door was open after the school had skailed there was a group of children round it. They loved to see the quick play of his knife as he trimmed a heel; the smooth, quick sweep of his right hand over his apron-covered thigh as he twisted his thread; the play of his hands—the left held steady, the right armed with the wax-ball, as he waxed the flaxen strands before mounting the bristles; the brisk tap-tap of his hammer as he drove the nails home; the sleight of hand with which he conveyed tackets from his bench to his mouth, and from his mouth to the shoe. That little flagged shop, dim-lit and redolent of leather, was a veritable cave of wonder to many a village lad; and the cobbler was a magician. Their elders, with the less penetrating vision of mature years, saw in the cobbler a warped old miser; the children saw deeper, and knew him for a not unkindly man.

Often he talked with them. Sometimes he told them as he worked the purpose of what he did. Sometimes he asked them questions: What were they learning at school; what did they hope to do when they grew up? And long years after, Robert Aitken, Professor of Hebrew in the University of Edinburgh, and son of the shepherd at Drumwhat, remembered

with a mist before his eyes that he had received the first encouragement for his ambition from the cobbler of Dalbean.

"An' what are ye thinkin' o' dacin', Robbie, when ye're a man?" he had asked.

"I'd like tae gang tae the College," he had answered timidly—half-daunted by the seeming impossibility of his dream.

"That's richt! that's richt!—aim high. Come here an' I'll learn ye hoo tae mount a bristle," and Robbie, pushed precipitately into the shop by some of the boys behind, received a first and last lesson in the cobbler's craft. Little did he care that the favour thus bestowed on him brought a speedy Nemesis on his homeward way when his companions pelted him heartily with peats. More than one lad of parts has been stoned by his contemporaries.

The children were his friends, and he had friends for his lonely hours. In the winter evenings, if you were passing down the Wynd you might have heard the sound of haunting music come from the room above the shop. Jamie was at his fiddle, and if you had paused to listen and had heard with the spirit rather than with the ear of flesh, you would have known that his soul was finding utterance in the notes he conjured from the throbbing strings. For a fiddle, under the chin of a lover, may speak that lover's thoughts; and though Jamie played nothing but "the auld kent tunes" he played them as they had never been played in Dalbean before. Even

Willie Shed, who was grudging in praise, admitted that; while little Willie Sproule, the boy whose mother was French, would stand beneath the cobbler's window for an hour at a time—his lips parted, his hands clasped, his soul drinking in some message from the notes that trembled through the night. Jamie's fiddling was as balm to the bruised heart of the boy, who forgot, as he listened, the jacket patched with grey flannel petticoat—the brand that seared his soul. And once, as he listened, he cried, he knew not why. That was on a night in March, the year the cobbler died. If he could have peeped into the cobbler's room he would have seen him playing with the tears stealing down his worn cheeks; and the fiddle was speaking with the gentle voice of a woman, sorrowing. It was never heard in Dalbean again.

And he had friends in books. On the long summer evenings you might have seen him sitting on a straight backed chair in his garden, under the apple-tree, with a book in his hand. It was covered carefully in brown paper, and if you had been close enough you might have seen that the cobbler's thumb rested upon a neat round disk of chamois leather slung by a thread from the top of the brown paper backing. It was to protect the white margin of the page—for the cobbler loved his books and would have deemed it a sacrilege to leave a thumb-mark upon his beloved Gibbon or his precious Kant, the companions of many a lonely hour.

II

Meg Wallace sat by the fireside in Phemie Brown's kitchen. It was washing-day, and Meg, who made her living by washing and charring, or, as we say in Dalbean, by "redding up the hoose," was waiting for the tea to mask. She had folded her apron of sacking over her half-dried arms to shield them from the fire, and she sat with knees apart and feet square-planted upon the hearth, her arms in her lap.

"Aye!—as I was tellin' ye, Mrs. Broon—he's that far through he canna last lang. But what else can ye expect? The auld miser hasna ta'en a guid meal o' meat this twalmonth."

"Ye surprise me, Meg. I had nae thocht he was as bad as that!"

"Weel, I'm tellin' ye! an' I ken. I've redd up his hoose for mair nor twenty year, an' I've watched him get closer an' closer. An' there's nae need for't, for the kist below his bed is that fu' o' siller I canna move it."

Like every woman who makes a hobby of gossip, Meg knew the value of surprise. Mrs. Brown stopped midway between the dresser and the fire, a cup in either hand.

"Losh, Meg! ye dinna mean tae tell me the man has as muckle siller as that!"

"Fegs aye! forbye, I've nae doot, a lot in the bank. I tell ye he'll leave a fortune."

Mrs. Brown filled Meg's cup and her own, and

sat down. For a moment there was no sound but the clatter of briskly stirring teaspoons, then both women took a noisy gulp of tea.

"If I took ye up richt, Meg, ye were sayin' the cobbler has been starvin' himsel'."

"Aye! that's what I said, an' it's true. For a twalmonth or mair he's been leevin' on naething but oatmeal. Parritch tae break his fast on! parritch for his dinner! an' a farl o' dry oatcake an' water for his supper. It's a scandal."

"I've aye kent he was near, but I never thocht he was as near as that."

"If I wasna a wumman that minded her ain business an' carried nae tales frae hoose tae hoose I could tell ye a lot. 'Thenk ye!—I wull hae anither cup. It's maist refreshin'"—and with this sop to her conscience, and stimulus to her tongue she went on:

"He's been an auld skinflint a' his days, as Dalbean weel kens; but he's grown waur an' waur ilka year. I min' when he used tae smoke; he drapped it maybe fifteen year sin', sayin' it didna agree wi' him. Then he took tae sellin' a' that he grew in his garden—except a wheen taties, an' every egg the hens laid he kept for McGarrity the egg-man, an' mony a wordy battle I've heard between them, the cobbler sticking oot for an extra ha'penny the dizzen, the egg-man swearin' by a' the saints—ye ken he's an Irishman—that what wi' breakages an' cairrage an' the rest o't it was the ruined man he wad

be if he peyed a farthin' mair. But the cobbler ay cairried the day. He's as hard as his teeth, an' they're granite.

"But the last twa year he's been waur than ever. He used tae gi'e me eighteenpence for reddin' up his hoose. Aboot twa year sin' he cut it doon tae a shillin' sayin' he could redd up the shop himsel'; and though it was again' the grain I had tae gi'e in—for a shillin's a shillin'.

"An' wull ye believe it, for the last twalmonth nae reek has come through his lum except whan he's been boilin' his parritch. He grudges himsel' even a bit o' fire—an' it's little wunner his broonkitis has been gettin' waur an' waur, an' he's been less an' less able tae work. Think ye!—if ye think ye can squeeze the pot for anither cup. The last has ay maist body in it."

"An' wha dae ye think it wull gang tae?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"That's what fair bothers me," answered Meg. "Sae far as I ken he has nayther kith nor kin. Savin's juist a vice wi' him."

"Weel! he canna tak' his siller wi' him. I wunner if he's got some relations in Ameriky. I've heard tell o' a similar case—o' an' auld man wha pinched himsel' tae save money, an' when he deed it a' went tae a nephew in Ameriky, wha flung it aboot like water."

"I wunner!" answered Meg—as, uninvited, she lifted the teapot from the hob and poured

into her leaf-speckled cup a last dribble of concentrated tea—"As like as no'."

From the wash-tub in the back-kitchen, her arms buried to the elbows in soap-suds, she communicated one more bit of information.

"Ye'll hardly believe it!—but it shows what he's come tae. A month back he sellt a' his books except Burns, and six months afore that he sellt his fiddle."

Mrs. Brown did not answer. Her attention had been arrested by the sound of wheels and, looking through the window, she saw the doctor's gig draw up before the cobbler's door. Fifteen minutes later she saw the doctor come out again. He did not, as was his wont, climb into the gig, but he walked across the street and knocked at her door.

"Good morning, Mrs. Brown," he said. "I'm sorry to disturb you on washing day," for the steam in the kitchen and the smell of soap suds told his experienced eye and nose what was on hand. "Is Meg Wallace here?"

Meg lifted her arms from the wash-tub at the sound of her name, and came forward, drying her hands roughly on her apron.

"If Mrs. Brown will be so kind as to spare you, Meg," said the doctor, "I want you to go and see to the cobbler; he's too ill to be left alone."

"I couldna think o' standin' in the wey, doctor, if he's as bad as that," answered Mrs. Brown.

"Weel," said Meg, "since Mrs. Broon raises nae objection, I'll gang owre as sune as I have feenished the rinsin'—that'll maybe half an oor. He'll no slip awa' afore that, wull he?"

The doctor shook his head. "Hardly!" he said.

"Hae ye ony instructions?" asked Meg.

The doctor stepped to the gig which the driver had brought across the street, and took his bag from under the rug. He opened it, and from one of its canvas pockets took a flask.

"See that he has his medicine every four hours; he has just had a dose now; and let him have a teaspoonful of this brandy in a tablespoonful of water every hour. And keep him well propped up in bed, and for heaven's sake light a fire in his room; it's as cold as the grave. I'll see him again to-night."

He handed her the flask, and with a further apology to Mrs. Brown for interfering with the washing, he climbed into his gig and took the road again.

Meg returned to her wash-tub, and proceeded with her rinsing.

"I'm feared I'll hae tae ask ye tae hing this tubfu' oot yersel', Mrs. Broon; deein' fowk winna wait."

"That'll be a' richt, Meg. I shouldna think o' lettin' my washin' stand in the wey whan daith's aboot," answered Mrs. Brown as she busied herself about the fire.

When Meg was ready Mrs. Brown had a bowl of broth steaming on the table.

“Tak’ this owre tae the cobbler wi’ my best respects,” she said. “I’ve disputed his chairges mony a time, but I bear the man nae ill-wull; an’ it’ll dae him guid.”

Meg looked at the bowl. “He’s awfu’ independent,” she said, “an’ micht tak’ it as an offence; but I’ll tak’ it, an’ try him. An’, Mrs. Broon, ye heard what the doctor said aboot a fire. If there’s nae coal in the hoose may I borrow some frae ye?”

“Certainly, Meg! come back if ye want ony”—and Meg took her way to the cobbler’s house.

When at the end of a long day’s round the doctor visited his patient again he found that warmth and the stimulant, combined with Meg’s natural skill in nursing, had wrought some change in him, for his breathing was easier, his cough was less distressing, and his tired heart was beating a little less feebly.

He unfastened the coarse grey night-shirt over the cobbler’s chest, and applied his stethoscope over the heart.

He listened a moment, then raised his head.

“Ye’re a wee better the nicht, Jamie,” he said encouragingly, using, as he always did in the privacy of the sick room, the kindly common speech of the folk he loved.

The cobbler shook his head. “A wee mair

comfortable nae doot, doctor, but nae rale progress. I ken I'm near ma hinner en'."

He spoke without emotion, as one declaring a self-evident but impersonal fact. The doctor made no reply. He knew the cobbler spoke the truth. His long experience had taught him that the dying themselves are the first to hear about their beds the beating of the wings of Death.

For a moment there was silence, save for the sound of the cobbler's wheezing breath. Then Meg, in the room below, moved a chair noisily.

Somewhat hesitatingly the cobbler laid his hand upon the doctor's arm. "Can you gi'e me half an oor o' yer time, doctor? I want tae talk tae ye."

"Certainly, Jamie!" answered the doctor. "My work is done for the day."

"An' ye'll no' chairge me for keepin' ye?"

"Hoots, man! Ye should ken me better than that," answered the doctor laughingly.

"Weel, I wanted tae mak' shure, doctor. I ken ye'll forgi'e me the liberty o' askin', for wi' sic extravagance as has gane on in ma hoose the day"—and he looked viciously at the fire—"it behoves me tae be carefu'."

The doctor spoke firmly—"Man, Jamie!" he said, "if ye had only spent a little mair o' yer money on yersel' an' no hoarded it a' up as I've heard tell ye've done, ye would hae got mair enjoyment oot o' life an' no' be lyin' here the nicht sae weak an' ill."

"That's as may be, doctor. But them that

tell ye I hoarded money, lee. I'm a puir man."

The doctor was prepared for this denial. No men are so poor in their own estimation as those in whose hearts the canker-worm of miserliness feeds fat.

Meg's footfall was heard on the stairs.

"Send that wumman awa' for half an oor, doctor. She's nocht but a gossipin' blether, an' I've a lot tae tell ye."

The doctor dismissed Meg, telling her to go over to Mrs. Brown's and wait there till he called for her.

She took her departure gladly enough, being sure of a cup of tea in exchange for her news.

The cobbler waited till the click of the latch on the outer door told him that Meg was out of the house: then he turned to the doctor.

"If ye've feenished examinin' me, ye micht pit oot the caunle. It's sheer wastry usin' licht whan the mune's shinin'."

The doctor picked up the candle. "Jamie," he said, "the worst I've ever heard o' ye is true. Ye're an auld miser," and he laughed. As he blew out the light his eyes fell on a bookshelf above the bed—empty save for one book.

"What have ye dune wi' yer books, Jamie?" he asked.

"I had tae sell them, but I kept Burns. I couldna pairt wi' him."

In the pale light of the moon the face of the cobbler was of ghostly whiteness. He looked

like one dead, so that, almost involuntarily, the doctor laid a finger on his pulse. As he was about to withdraw it the cobbler seized his hand and held it. Then, in broken sentences, interrupted by spells of coughing, and hurried noisy breathing, he said :

“ Doctor, I’ve ta’en a liberty. I’ve made ye ane o’ my trustees. I meant tae tell ye afore, an’ ask yer leave ; but I never had a proper chance. Wull ye act ? ”

“ Certainly, Jamie ! ”

“ Thank ye, doctor, thank ye ! ” And the doctor felt the gnarled hand of the dying man close in a feeble grip upon his arm.

“ An’ when I’m deid an’ gane, the first thing ye maun dae is to write to Professor McQuarrie o’ Glesca’ University, an’ tell him I’m awa’. He’s the ither trustee.”

“ Do you know Professor McQuarrie ? And have you his leave to appoint him ? ”

“ No, I dinna ken him ; an’ nae doot I’ve ta’en a great liberty. But I think he’ll act. Aye, I think he’ll act. So as sune as I’m awa’ let him ken, an’ tell him the time o’ the buryin’. He nicht want tae come.”

The doctor looked at the pale face of the dying man. Was some disordered fancy running riot in his brain ? Surely not ! his thoughts were coherent ; and his speech, though difficult, clear enough.

“ Aye ! he nicht like tae come ; an’ it’s the proud man I wud be if he were there. I’ll hae

a puir eneuch convoy tae the kirkyard—that I ken, for I've no been weel-liked i' Dalbean. They think I'm hard, and maybe I am; but they haena kent, they haena kent," and the cobbler's feeble voice trembled.

The doctor patted him gently on the shoulder, and after a moment he went on.

"There's a box below the bed. In it ye'll fin' my will, an' a' my papers wi' fu' instructions. There's a list o' oot-standin' debts. Though it'll cost money ye'd better get Scott the writer in Whinburn tae collect them; an' tell him no' tae let onybody off. Some o' them wull mak' a puir mooth; but they've had guid service, an' guid leather, an' they maun juist pay. But, ye can cancel a' debts owing by widda wummen; if I min' richt there's three; an' they dinna amount tae muckle. An' then ye maun sell the guid-wull o' the business, an' the stock-in-trade. The guid-wull is worth a hunner, the stock-in-trade maybe twenty. Nae doot the purchaser wull want tae drive a hard bargain, but ye'll see tae that. Dinna let him hae as muckle as a pun' o' tackets for naething."

A long spell of coughing interrupted him. The doctor raised the cobbler up and supported him with his arm, and, when the spasm was over, let him sink gently back on the heaped-up pillows.

"Tak' yer time, Jamie. There's nae hurry," he whispered soothingly.

Jamie lay for a moment exhausted. The

doctor's finger on his wrist felt his pulse falter and flicker. He put some brandy to his lips. The cobbler sipped it, and continued slowly :

" I've made a' arrangements for the buryin'. Ezra Snubb, the wricht, pit his name tae paper ; he'll cairry a' through for thirty shillin'. He wanted twa poun' ten, but I screwed him doon tae thirty shillin's ; a kist o' white pine, pented black. Ye'll see, for I'll no' be able tae see for masel', that he doesna' skimp the black pent. An' when I'm pit safely by, there's the heid stane. Wullie Shed, the stanemason, has signed the bond for that—an auld thruch stane for ten shillin'. The auld letterin' can lie next the grun'—naebody'll ever ken. An' dinna forget he's tae chairge nae mair than threepence a letter. It's a' writ doon in the bond."

The old man's face, which, as he talked, had worn an expression of great seriousness, as though his mind were urgent upon a weighty task, relaxed for a moment in a smile.

" While I think o't, doctor, that's a maitter tae mak' a note o'. Ye see I bargained wi' Wullie Shed that, nae maitter whan I shud dee, he would chairge for nae mair than six letters in the name o' the month. I'm decin' in November—so I'm twa letters tae the guid—a hale sixpence, an' it wull a' be needed. A man wi' Wullie's shifty een might try tae cheat ye there, but ye'll watch him, doctor ; ye'll keep him tae it ! "

The doctor laughed so heartily that in that

chamber of death the sound of his laugh struck him with sudden shame. He felt, rather than saw, the eyes of the cobbler fixed upon him.

"It's nae laughing maitter, doctor! I'm a puir man—heavily in debt, an' it wull tak' every penny tae clear ma guid name."

Here at last is delusion, thought the doctor; but he said nothing.

There was a long pause, broken by a fit of coughing; then the doctor spoke:

"Say no more, Jamie! I'll see tae everything for ye. Trust me."

"Thenk ye, doctor!" and the feeble hand of the cobbler closed round the doctor's. "Ye've been a rale frien' tae me. Guid-nicht!"

"Guid-nicht, Jamie. I hope ye'll sleep, and I'll be roon' first thing in the morning to see you. Guid-nicht!"

He groped in the moonlight for the door, and began carefully to descend the narrow stair.

When he was half-way down he halted—brought to a stand by the voice of the sick man.

"Doctor! there's ane thing mair."

"Yes, Jamie," he answered. "What is it!"

"I'm ashamed tae say it, but when ye send in yer bill ye'll no' forget tae alloo for the empty bottles. There maun be half a dizzen in the back kitchen."

The doctor smiled in the darkness. "Eh, Jamie! Jamie!" he cried.

Sometime before the first cock-crow, Meg Wallace, keeping a drowsy vigil beside the dying

man, was startled into sudden wakefulness by the silence of the room. The wheezy breathing of the cobbler had ceased; his tired heart had acknowledged defeat.

III

In the village of Dalbean important events such as funerals were notified by the bellman—Andy Ferguson. Andy had one arm and a half: he had lost the greater portion of his left in the Mutiny, but the stump served to carry the bell pressed against his body.

Four times, from different points of vantage, he made his announcement. There was a jangle of the bell to give warning. It brought folk to their doors—then the harsh voice of the old drill-sergeant proclaimed sonorously, in a single key:

“Tak’ notice. This is to announce that James Burnie, cobbler, departed this life this morning at 3 a.m. His mortal remains will be interred in Dalbean Kirkyaird on Thursday afternoon, the 26th curt., at 2 p.m. Will frien’s kindly accept this, the only intimation.”

He made his last announcement opposite the stonemason’s yard. Willie Shed, a little, wiry man, with red-rimmed, reddish eyes, rust-coloured hair, and sharp reddish beard, beckoned him.

“So the cobbler’s deid, Andy?”

“Aye, Wullie, an’ cryin’s drouthy wark.”

“Weel!—come an’ hae yer ‘mornin’.”

Ten minutes later the two were in the stonemason's yard.

"Aye! this is the stane he waled himsel'. It's an auld ane. I'm tae lay it wi' the face next the grun', an' pit the new letterin' on the back."

"That was like him, the auld screw! A lot o' guid his money wull dae him noo."

"Andy, can ye spell November wi' fowre letters?"

"Aye!" answered the puzzled bellman.

"So can I, Andy. I'm saxpence tae the guid."

"I canna follow ye, Wullie."

"There's nae need tae, it's juist a thocht o' ma ain."

"Think ye there'll be mony at the buryin'?"

The stonemason laughed. "It's no' likely—there'll no' be as muckle as a tastin'. Funerals are no' what they were, and Jamie wasna weel liked. He hadna a rale frien' in the place. We a' despised him. He was owre near tae be sociable."

"Weel! tho' I cry funerals I rarely attend them. I'm peyed for ane and no' the ither, so I'm stoppin' at hame. Forbye the doctor an' the meenister and the wricht, wha hae tae be there as a maitter o' duty, I'm thinkin' Jamie Burnie wull get a puir convoy tae the kirkyaird."

"He deserves nae better. He was awfu' mean," said the stonemason.

Much the same sentiment was being expressed in more than one of the houses in the village.

"Time's money—even in a wee place like this," said the smith, "an' I'll juist be pittin' intae practice ane o' his ain principles—tae waste naething—if I stay awa'."

Thursday came—a day of strange happenings still remembered. The cobbler's funeral day became a date of note. Mothers reckoned the ages of their children by it. "Hoo auld is Joe, were ye askin'? Let me see. He was born the year efter the cobbler's funeral." So Time, the leveller, did him posthumous honour.

The first event of the day was a telegram received by the tenant of the Blue Bell. It was addressed "The Hotel Keeper, Dalbean," and ordered lunch for twenty-three persons at 12.30. It was signed "McQuarrie."

The innkeeper handed the missive to his wife. "Can ye dae it?" he asked.

She read the message and took a long breath.

Then, looking up at the farthest corner of the ceiling, she muttered: "Broth, chicken, aipple-tairt, cheese an' coffee: aye! But wha's McQuarrie?"

"Hoo should I ken?" answered the puzzled husband. "It micht be a hunt-the-gowk" (hoax).

"As like as no'—but we daurna risk that. I'll awa' tae the kitchen an' set the lassies on. Pit tae yer haun', man, an' dinna staun' there gapin' like a gommeril. Ye can spread the tables," and the stout little woman bustled off on her flat feet, with her toes out-turned, to

execute the biggest order that had come to the Blue Bell for many a day.

When, half an hour later, Willie Shed dropped into the inn for his "mornin'," he found Davie Peacock too busy to join him.

"Ye'll hae tae drink it stannin'. I want a' the chairs," said the shirt-sleeved innkeeper, as he bustled about.

"What's a' the steer?" asked the stonemason.

"There's a big pairty comin' for denner!—I'm far owre thrang tae talk," and Willie had to leave with his thirst mollified, but his curiosity unsatisfied.

The innkeeper's wife was plunging a fork through the seething water into the potato-pot when she heard the crunch of wheels on the gravel at the door.

Quickly the innkeeper slipped on his coat, and hurried into the hall. Two large wagonettes were discharging their passengers: twenty-three muffled men, black-coated, silk-hatted. A little grey-bearded man, with brown eyes deep-set beneath shaggy eyebrows above which rose a broad forehead, detached himself from the crowd and entered the inn.

"I am Professor McQuarrie," he said. "I trust my telegram arrived."

"Yes, sir! an' luncheon will be served prompt at 12.30, sir. This way, gentlemen"—and the party entered the inn.

The drivers unyoked their horses and took

them round to the inn stable, leaving their vehicles in the street.

A crowd of children had gathered near the inn door; the noise of the wagonettes had brought many people to their windows.

"Wha are they?" asked Willie Shed—his ferret-face pushed half through the railings round his yard.

"Hoo should I ken?" answered Jamie Kerr, to whom the inquiry had been addressed. "They micht be a depitation frae the Presbytery."

"Hoots, Jamie!" answered Willie. "There's only ane dog-collar amang them; an' if they were frae the Presbytery the meenister would be here tae meet them."

Half an hour later the two drivers, having foddered their horses, strolled smoking into the smiddy.

"Hoo's a' wi' ye, Sam'l?" they said in one breath.

"Guidsakes, Bob!—losh, Alec! is it you? Hoo's a' in Whinburn, an' whit are ye dacin' in Dalbean the day?"

"We've been bringing a pairty o' gentry tae a funeral here," answered Alec. "Wha's deid?"

"A pairty o' gentry!" repeated the smith, incredulity in his tones. "The only deid body I've heard tell o' is the cobbler. They're buryin' him at twa o'clock. They canna hae come tae his funeral. Ye're ha'cin' me on!"

"As shure as death; it's the truth we're

tellin'!" answered Bob, "an' they're proper gentry, I can tell ye. Ane is a professor frae Glesca', an' there's anither they ca' Sir Thomas; ye min' him, Alec—the ane wi' the fur coat?"

"Aye!" answered Alec. "That's Sir Thomas Noble, ane o' the Queen's Physicians; the gentleman that sat on the dicky beside me let on as muckle."

"This bates a'!" exclaimed the astonished smith. "Come awa' ben, an' Aggie wull gie ye a dram. I maun hurry up an' get ready for the funeral masel'."

"Thenk ye kindly—we canna wait, oor denner wull be ready at the inn—but, when the funeral's owre, we nicht drap in afore we yoke again."

"Right! I'll expect ye," and the smith threw off his leather apron quickly, happed down his fire, and hurried into the house. "Aggie! whaur's Jamie?" he cried.

Jamie answered from the back kitchen.

"Rin, laddie!" said his father, "an' tell Wullie Shed an' Davie Miller, an' Tam Urquhart, an' Jamie Kerr, an' Peter Strang that they maun come tae the cobbler's funeral. Say yer faither's gaun an' they've got tae come an' bring as mony mair as they can. We maunna disgrace Dalbean. Hasten ye!"

The boy raced off.

"Come on, faither! yer denner's waitin'," called his wife; but the smith had gone upstairs.

She followed him, and found him rummaging

in the chest of drawers that stood in the window recess.

"What are ye lookin' for, Sam'l?" she asked.

"Whaur's my blecks? It's a queer hoose this—that a man can never fin' his ain things. What hae ye dune wi' them?"

"They're whaur they aye are!" answered Aggie testily, "in the press in the wa'. What dae ye want them for?"

"Talk sense, wumman! when dae I ever wear them except for a funeral? Dae ye no ken they're buryin' the cobbler at twa?"

"Aye! I ken that fine—but I thoct ye weren't gaun'. I heard ye say as muckle."

"I'll be maister in ma ain hoose, wumman. I'll gang if I like," answered the smith, in whom a blending of wonder and excitement was expressing itself in irritation.

His wife did not take up the challenge. She was too wise for that.

"I'll set ye a basin o' hot water in the back-kitchen, an' I'll look oot yer claes an' yer collar while ye're washin'."

When his ablutions were performed the smith returned to his bedroom. His blacks were all laid out neatly on the bed. He donned them slowly—summoning his wife to aid him in fastening his collar, which she did with a hairpin.

"Collars are dang'd nuisances!" he growled.

"Wheesht, man! It's en neo; an' ye look quite smert. Ye'd better hae a bite o' something

afore ye set oot. Ye've twenty meenites yet!"

In the middle of a hasty meal in the kitchen the smith was seized by sudden alarm.

"Whaur's my lum hat, Aggie?"

"Losh!" she answered, dismay upon her face.

She raced upstairs. The smith, impatient, heard her hurried scrambling; heard drawers pulled out, and viciously pushed in again; heard the press-door squeak on its hinges, and then bang to. He stamped upstairs to help in the search. He looked under his bed; he rummaged in drawers and press. It was not there. By this time his wife was in the kitchen. She was scrambling in the drawers of the dresser.

A cold sweat had broken on the smith's forehead.

The hat was nowhere to be found.

"This bates a'!" he grumbled.

"Whan did ye wear it last?" she asked.

He thought for a moment. "It maun be five year sin'," he groaned.

"Ye dinna think ye've used it for the tatie-bogle?" asked his wife, seeking a possible explanation of the mystery.

"Dod, wumman! dae ye think ye're mairrit tae a fule?" he growled. "Here it is!" and he produced it from inside the eight-day clock.

Battered, dusty, its pile brushed the wrong way, it looked disreputable enough; but Aggie, with ready wit, brushed it before the fire, and

dressed it with a few drops of castor-oil smeared on a sponge.

"Man! ye can see yer face in't," she said, as she handed it to her impatient husband, who put it on hastily and hurried out.

When he reached the cobbler's house, the coffin, slung in ropes, was being lowered from the upper window. There was a look of fussy importance on the egg-shaped face of Ezra Snubb, the wright, who was in charge of the operation. On the cobbles before the door stood two trestles upon which the coffin was laid. The mourners gathered in a semicircle round it, the strangers in the foreground, the Dalbean folk, shamed into showing respect to one of themselves, hanging self-consciously and a little restlessly on the outskirts. Something was happening in their midst to which they had no clue. Their pride was piqued, but with becoming dignity they removed their hats, doing honour to the dead which they had denied to the living.

It was our custom in Dalbean to divide the funeral service into two parts: one at "the lifting," the other at the committal to mother earth. Standing at the head of the coffin, the minister read the ninetieth Psalm, and then engaged in prayer.

Jamie had been a poor kirk attender, and had more than once given utterance to views, borrowed from Kant, that had perplexed the minister. His prayer was therefore cautious

and non-committal, and he prayed in general terms, beseeching the Almighty to bring home to everyone there assembled the uncertainty of life, the dread certainty of death and the hereafter. "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," he said, and his Amen was the most fervent petition in his prayer. There was nothing in his words to stir emotion, or to move the heart, but more than one of the strangers, looking upon the shabby coffin, with not a flower to grace it nor a trapping to relieve its blackness, brushed away a tear. So at least the story is told by the smith and Davie Miller. And then the minister stood aside, and Ezra Snubb and his three assistants came forward to lift the coffin and bear it to the kirkyard on the hillside a quarter of a mile away. Ezra had spoken the word, and his men were stooping to their task when there stepped out of the little throng a tall and handsome man, with a keen but kindly face who waved the wright aside. He raised his hand and five more of the strangers who had come to Dalbean that day drew near the shabby coffin. Reverently they lifted it—and James Burnie, cobbler, the rejected of Dalbean, too "near" to have a friend, was borne to his grave by Sir Thomas Noble, Physician to the Queen in Scotland; by a Writer to the Signet; the headmaster of a famous Academy; an eminent Glasgow lawyer; a Professor of Moral Philosophy; and a great Glasgow banker.

The procession fell in—the strangers two and two behind the coffin, Professor McQuarrie and the doctor following the minister, who walked alone in front; the villagers straggling irregularly behind. Up the wynd they went and along the village street, and as the coffin passed more than one blind was drawn hastily down in belated respect. The bell tolled as the bearers entered the kirkyard gate. Over the open grave on two strong planks the coffin rested. Ere it was lowered one of the strangers prayed the “committal prayer.” Later we learned he was a doctor of divinity and the minister of a great city church. His prayer was such as moves strong men to tears. He prayed as one who had lost a father, he thanked God for such noble men as “this our brother,” and he spoke of a life of sacrifice that would not be denied its reward.

And then the coffin was lowered by those who had borne it to its resting-place, who stood for a moment with bare heads looking down upon it between the narrow earthen walls, then turned away to give place to others who pressed forward.

The November afternoon was closing in as the stragglers came down the brae from the kirkyard.

“Yon was a graun’ prayer at the graveside,” said the smith to Willie Shed.

“Aye!—but yon meenister kent nocht o’ the cobbler, or he wudna hae talked o’ sacrifice, answered the stone-mason. “As like as no’ it’s

a prayer he aye uses on sic occasions: fu' o' saft sawder tae comfort the relations. He kent nocht o' the man."

"Maybe!" answered the smith, who was thinking hard, but seeing no light. "Things hae been happenin' the day I canna get the grip o'."

By four o'clock the strangers, all but Professor McQuarrie, had departed in their wagonettes. They were catching an evening train at Whinburn. But, ere they went, the Queen's Physician and the Doctor of Divinity walked down to the cobbler's house.

Meg Wallace let them in. She told Mrs. Brown about it the same evening.

"Maist ceevil they were. They walked a' roon'—speakin' quate like, an' they went up the stairs an' looked at the room whaur he deed. The ane wi' the fur coat—they tell me he's the Queen's Doctor, was greetin' whan he cam' doon—at least he wiped his een wi' his silk hanky—an' I heard him say, 'A man like this is worthy o' the Abbey.' I didna unnerstaun' what he meant; but the meenister wi' him kent, for he said wi' a shaky voice: 'Yes, of such is the Kingdom.'

"An' it's no a lee I'm tellin' ye. They speired if I had waited on the cobbler whan he was deecin'—an' I telt them that I was wi' him at the last—an' they baith shook me by the haun'; an' the Queen's Doctor slipped what I thought was a shillin' intae my luif—but when I looked at

it efter they had gane it was a golden sovereign. It bates a'”—and she exhibited the coin in the palm of her hand to prove she did not lie.

IV

Professor McQuarrie and the doctor sat in the doctor's parlour, each in a deep easy chair.

The red curtains were drawn closely over the window ; a bright fire burned in the grate ; the room was pleasantly warm. A shaded crystal lamp on the table shed a circle of mellow light that fell softly on the green cloth. Just outside the circle, in the half-light, stood the wooden box that had lain under the cobbler's bed for many years. It was his treasure-chest—which many a time had whetted the curiosity of Meg Wallace, and inspired her gossip.

The professor was speaking—his long thin hands held vertically before him, his finger-tips touching :

“ As I was saying, no one who does not know them intimately can imagine the hardships many of our students are prepared to face in order to obtain a university education.”

The doctor, with a memory of his own early struggles stirring within him, nodded his head.

“ It is a fine trait in our national character, that our young men should recognise that, however humble their birth, they can win for themselves, by the exercise of their gifts, a place in the aristocracy of intellect. Some, as you

know, go down in the struggle; others win through triumphantly, and the struggle makes men of them. Now, look at Sir Thomas Noble."

The professor paused for a moment and looked at his finger tips; then he went on:

"It is a long story, doctor! but I shall be as brief as possible. Let me begin at the beginning. Possibly you may know that I myself began life as a cobbler. I was brought up by an uncle who followed that trade, and, at the age of twelve, I left school and joined my uncle in the shop. I am afraid, however, I was a poor cobbler"—the professor laughed quietly—"my uncle often told me so—but my mind was on books, not leather, and I was ambitious. I need say no more, except that, after a struggle which I have not yet forgotten, I succeeded in fighting my way to Glasgow University;—from thence I went to Oxford, and now, as you know, I am Professor of Latin in my old Alma Mater. That post I have held for twenty-seven years. At the time of my appointment, the newspapers, as newspapers will, raked up my history and gave a somewhat highly coloured account of my early struggles. *The Sentinel*, I remember, headed its notice, FROM COBBLER'S BENCH TO PROFESSOR'S CHAIR, and held me up as an example worthy of the emulation of all our Scottish youth. God knows how little I deserved such praise. Forgive me for mentioning this; I do so simply to lead up to my connection with the remarkable man whose body we have laid to rest to-day.

“ Well, about two years after my appointment I received a letter from James Burnie. I have it here.” He took a letter-case from his inside coat pocket—slipped an elastic band from it, and after a moment’s search picked out the letter he sought. “ Let me read it to you—just as it is—it will explain much :

“ ‘ DALBEAN,
“ ‘ *October 1st, 1859.*

“ ‘ To Professor McQuarrie, Professor of
Humanity, Glasgow University :

“ ‘ HONOURED SIR,

“ ‘ Pardon the liberty I take in approaching you, but I mind reading that you began your career as a cobbler, and though you are now a professor I have no doubt you look back to the old days with pride and satisfaction. It is because of what you were that I am now writing to you. I am a cobbler myself, without dependents, and I am anxious to do a little to help some of the deserving lads at the college. I enclose notes for one hundred pounds sterling which I should like you to use for the behoof of any students you may know of who are having a hard struggle. There must be many such. The money will not go far, but it will help. I leave the division of it to your discretion ; but I make two conditions : first, that my name is kept secret, at least during my life, and, second, that you will let me have, for my own satisfaction, the names of those you help. I shall

take it as a favour if you will keep me informed as to their progress, for I do not want to help the unworthy. If you will undertake this trust you will greatly oblige one who is proud to regard you as a brother craftsman who has conferred great honour on the trade. So long as my health is spared I hope to send you a like amount every year. I have no right to expect you to favour me by undertaking this responsibility, but, honoured sir, please do not deny me.

“Yours respectfully,

“‘JAMES BURNIE.’”

The professor folded the letter carefully, and replaced it in his pocket-book.

“Needless to say,” he resumed, “I undertook the trust, and the first beneficiary was Thomas Noble. He had been a prizeman in my class the previous Session, but disaster had overtaken his father—a small farmer—and the lad had written to tell me that he must abandon all hope of a professional career. I wrote to him at once, urging him to come back to us, and telling him that a sum of money had been placed in my hands to lend help in such cases as his. With natural independence he demurred; but I persuaded him, and with the help I was able to give him, eked out by what he earned from coaching, he was able to complete his course in Arts. A scholarship he won carried him through medicine, in which faculty he covered himself with distinction; but it was James Burnie’s aid

which saved him at the critical moment; it was your cobbler's money which gave the Queen her most trusted physician.

"And there were many more—you saw some of them to-day—who benefited in greater or less degree by the hundred pounds sent me year after year by this humble benefactor. I tried to exercise my trust with care. Some of my colleagues, in whom I confided, brought special cases of hardship to my notice, and I was able to spread the cobbler's benefaction widely. In no case did I assume the whole burden of any man's education; but I helped many—wisely, I trust—in the hour of need, and made burdens that might have been intolerable such as could be borne. Scotland has reason to thank your cobbler for the men of note whom he has given her."

The professor took out his snuff-box, and after tapping it solemnly on the lid, offered it to the doctor. The doctor waved it away with a word of thanks. The professor took a copious pinch, and, after a moment, continued:

"Year after year, as regularly as October came round, I received another letter from the cobbler containing one hundred pounds. It was the sum he had set himself to give, and nobly he performed his self-imposed task. But for the last few years there has been a falling off. One year he sent eighty-five pounds, another eighty, another seventy-two, and this year sixty-four; and with his last gift came a letter regretting

that the amount was so small, but promising to make it up some day."

The doctor had been listening so intently that his pipe had gone out, though he still continued to suck its stem. He grasped the cold bowl, and took the stem from his mouth. Speaking almost in a whisper, he said :

"Poor Jamie! That's why his fiddle went! That's why he sold his books. Professor—did you never come to see him?"

The professor sat forward in his chair.

"Doctor!" he said, and his voice was trembling—"to the end of my days I shall blame myself for this. Over and over again I asked his permission to visit him, and more than once I urged him to come and see me in Glasgow, but he besought me with such earnestness not to do the one, nor insist upon the other, that I yielded to him. And now—it is too late! I shall never forgive myself. I am most blameworthy; but my neglect sprang from no lack of interest, but solely from the desire to fall in with the wishes of this noble man, who, I imagined, was shy and proud and reticent."

The doctor knocked the cold ashes from his pipe.

"If you are to blame, Professor! what of us here? James Burnie has, for twenty-five years, been the rejected of Dalbean. He had not a real friend in the place. He was looked upon as a close-fisted old miser who had made a god of his money, and put himself thereby beyond the

pale. What fools we have been! and I above all, for I should have known better. I did discover some fine traits in his character—but they were all overshadowed by what I thought was his besetting sin—his greed for gold. I have seen his strength failing for years—but he would never give in. I have watched what I thought was a vice grow gradually—as it always does—upon him, and now I learn that it was not love of money that possessed him, but a divine spirit of self-sacrifice.”

The professor nodded his head. “Yes!” he said, “a spirit of self-sacrifice even unto death. We cannot undo the past, doctor, but I am glad to think that honour was done to-day to James Burnie dead, which was denied to him living. Had there been more time I might have brought with me some others of those he helped. They would have been proud to come.”

“Yes!” said the doctor. “But it takes a lot of honour to the dead to atone for neglect of the living. One warm hand-grip in life is worth ten thousand tributes after death. I wish I had known—how I wish I had known!”

For a moment the two men sat silently looking into the shadows. Then the doctor rose, and took a key from his pocket. He had taken it from a string round Jamie’s neck after his death. He lifted the box into the pool of light cast by the lamp, and opened it. The professor had risen also, and the two men stood side by side and looked at its contents. They consisted of

several bundles of papers, neatly arranged, and each tied tightly with a leather lace. The doctor lifted them out one by one and laid them on the table, pushing aside the box to make room for them.

"Here is the will," said the Professor. Written in the cobbler's own hand, it contained but two clauses—one giving instructions for the payment of all his just debts, the other leaving "all of which I may die possessed to Professor McQuarrie, to be used at his discretion for a purpose of which he knows." That was all—no indication for prying eyes to learn what that purpose was.

"Reticent even in death," said the doctor. "How like him!"

"There is a codicil here," said the Professor, "written in a very shaky hand. Let me see"—and he adjusted his spectacles. "No!—it is not a codicil: merely a note appended to his will. He says—"Through ill-health I have been compelled to break my pledged word to Professor McQuarrie for the past five years. I trust that the proceeds of my estate will discharge my debt to him, and clear my good name.'"

The doctor sighed—"O Jamie! Jamie! that's the secret that lay behind your last talk with me—and I thought you were a miser. God forgive me!"

"And here," said the doctor, picking up two neatly folded docketed papers, "are 'Agreement with Ezra Snubb, wright, for my Funeral,' and

'Agreement with Willie Shed for my Tombstone'—systematic in all he did, professor. The very fee for these two contracts is here in an envelope inside them."

The professor picked up a large packet wrapped in brown paper. On it was written, "Letters from Professor McQuarrie." He untied the lace, and opened the bundle. "Yes! these are my letters to him—you may see them if you will, doctor, since you are my co-trustee; but after that I should like to have them back.

"Certainly, certainly, professor!" said the doctor—waving the bundle aside.

The doctor picked up a little red-bound notebook and opened it. He looked at the title-page and then turned over a few of the leaves and studied them intently. The Professor saw his lips trembling. He turned back to the title-page and said, "Look, Professor!" There in a firm hand was written—"The Record of my Boys"—and turning over a page the professor saw the heading: "Thomas Noble," and beneath, year after year, the list of honours that had come to him, till his latest—his appointment as Physician to the Queen.

Each page was devoted to a separate name, and some were the names of men who had won renown. The doctor and the professor scanned the records together. Then the professor spoke, and his voice was hushed like the voice of one who speaks in a sacred place.

"He has compiled this from the information I

sent him in my annual report. I am glad he had this great joy. Not one of his boys, as he called them, has failed him."

The little red book was placed on the table apart from the other contents of the box. The lamp's soft light fell upon it: it looked like a splash of blood.

"I think that is all!" said the Professor—and he ran his eye over the little heaps on the table, silently counting them.

"Yes," answered the doctor. "The box is empty, but let us make sure," and he lifted the folded newspaper with which it was lined. A little packet fell from it as he did so. The doctor picked it up, and looked at it. It was a small faded envelope, heavily sealed.

He handed it to the Professor, who ran his knife carefully along its edge. A stream of rusty-white droplets fell on the table cloth. The doctor bent over them: "White heather blossom," he said, "yellow with age."

"Look!" exclaimed the Professor, and he withdrew a portrait of a woman, comely and tall. The two men gazed at it intently; their heads touching. Neither spoke; then the professor turned it over and read:

"My dear Wife—died February 19th, 1857."

"I never knew he was a widower," said the doctor softly.

"There is something else here," said the professor, "or is it a duplicate?"

The doctor looked quickly at the little lilac-

bordered card in the professor's hand. From its glossy, fading surface the face of a boy looked out: a handsome lad with a well-modelled head and a bright look in his eyes.

"A fine boy!" said the doctor.

The professor turned the portrait over and tried to speak. His voice broke—he bit his lip, and stopped abruptly.

The doctor looked over his shoulder, and through the mist that rose unchecked before his eyes read hesitatingly:

"James Burnie—died February 21st, 1857.

Aged 12."

"MY AIN WEE LADDIE."

III

“ AS THE AULD COCK CRAWLS THE YOUNG ANE LEARNS ”

IT was Sabbath morning in Dalbean. Even the hens knew—for on that day they were denied their usual liberty, and kept shut in coops or herded together in the hen-house. They might lay if they liked—for did not the Catechism make due provision for the performance of works of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath Day? and laying eggs could be justified on both heads: first, as a work of necessity for the community, and of mercy to the hens. But they must be protected against two temptations—the temptation to lay away (a sin to be laid to their own account), and the possibility of leading the boys into the temptation of chasing them, the responsibility for which offence might be divided fairly between the feathered and the featherless bipeds. The cocks, too, were under the Sabbath spell, and modulated their crowing accordingly.

In the kitchen of the smith's house his wife Aggie was putting a sheep's head in a pot. She had singed and prepared it the night before. A capable or, as we say in Dalbean, a “ through-

gaun " woman, energy was written on every line of her strong figure. In shape like a cottage loaf, she had a kindly freckled face with a pair of cheerful blue eyes, and a defiant little nose which Sam'l, her husband, had learned to read as a weather-gauge of her moods. If her nose were tight-drawn, and pinched, the smith knew it behoved him to walk delicately in her presence, or, as he would have expressed it, " haud a calm sough." If the nostrils were dilated he knew that all was well, and that he might at a hazard venture to proclaim himself " maister in his ain hoose."

The smith sat by the fireside in his stocking soles. He had donned his Sabbath clothes—all but his jacket, and his arms, covered with his blue-and-white shirt sleeves, were folded across his chest. He was a buirdly man, with a big head: massive-shouldered, strong in the arm, heavy-handed. He had coarse dark hair, and a heavy dark beard. He suggested strength: the kind of man to take one's troubles to. He carried peppermint lozenges in his trouser pockets beside his tobacco. The one lent a flavour to the other, and the habit was a symbol of his nature, for in his character, as in his expression, there was a blend of the acrid and the agreeable—the pungent and the sweet. His name was Samuel Dunlop, but no one ever called him that except the minister, and Aggie when she was angry with him. Dalbean called him Sam'l; or on special occasions Sam'l Delap.

"Whaur's Jamie?" he asked suddenly.

Aggie swung the pot over the fire.

"The bairn's in his bed wi' a sair heid."

"A sair heid! What's he daein' wi' a sair heid? The godless wee rascal doesna want tae come tae the kirk. That's what's the maitter."

Aggie's nostrils tightened.

"Ye're a nice kin' o' man tae be the faither o' a bairn. The boy's ill, I tell ye. He didna sup his parritch. He micht be sickenin' for the fever," and she poked the fire viciously, dropping the poker with a clatter on the fender.

The smith unfolded his arms and moved uneasily in his chair.

"Hae ye gi'en him a dose o' ile?"

"No, I haena. I took ane up tae him, but he was sleepin'."

"If his heid was very sair, he couldna sleep, Aggie."

"Ye've nae feelin', Sam'l! Ye're only fit for a horse-doctor."

From past experience the smith knew that his wife was shifting the ground of conflict, and seeking to protect her boy by making an attack on his father's qualities of heart.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Are ye comin' tae the kirk, or are ye bidin' wi' the boy, Aggie?"

"I'm comin' tae the kirk, of course. The bairn can tak' nae haim in his bed; an' if I stayed awa' Providence micht pey me back by makin' him proper ill."

“ Aggie ! ” said the smith, whose views of the ways of Providence were not parochial, “ ye ca’ yersel’ a releegious wumman ; ye’re nae better nor a superstitious heathen.”

“ Think ye, Sam’l ! Ye’ve a lot o’ richt tae talk.”

The smith picked up his boots from the corner beside the eight-day clock and pulled them on. Then he put on his jacket and stamped upstairs to Jamie’s room. The sound of his footsteps would have waked any but the heaviest sleeper ; but Jamie, his nose buried under the blankets, his red hair a great rust-stain upon the white of the pillow, lay still as death. The smith studied him from the foot of the bed, then tip-toed out of the room and went quietly down the stairs.

In the kitchen Aggie joined him.

“ Weel, are ye satisfied ? ” she asked.

He made no answer, except to say—“ Yon’s the kirk bell. Come on, Aggie.”

Aggie lifted the lid of the pot, and replacing it turned towards the door.

“ There’s ane thing aboot sheep’s heid broth, Sam’l. The langer the sermon, the langer it boils, an’ the langer it boils the better the broth.”

“ Aye ! he preached for fifty-seven meenites by the clock last Sabbath—it’ll be an oor this mornin’. I wish he were shorter in the win’,” said Sam’l, as they took the road together.

“ Wha’s the heathen noo ? ” asked Aggie, as she halted to allow Mrs. Brown, who was coming up the wynd, to catch her up.

The smith walked on slowly. He had no love for Mrs. Brown. The sight of her usually set his teeth on edge, for she was sour of visage, and her lips pursed up as though an acid-drop lay permanently under her tongue.

It was a lovely September morning—the air was clean and wholesome; the roads, sodden two days before by a heavy deluge, had been dried by the wind and the sun; the yellowing corn beyond the hedge rustled pleasantly. It was good to be alive.

“Men are a’ alike—unfeelin’.” He recognised the tart voice of Mrs. Brown, who, in making such a sweeping assertion had, he knew, only himself in mind.

The road to the kirk passed over the river. On the bridge the smith stopped to look at the water. The women went on. He heard Aggie’s voice—“He micht be sickenin’ for the fever,” and Mrs Brown’s inquiry—“Hoo auld wull he be?” and her consoling comment—“Twal’s a kittle age.”

How bonnie the water looked! Two days ago it had been in heavy spate; yesterday it was running in more ample volume than usual, but the spate was over. To-day it flowed along its usual channels, an inch deeper perhaps, but no more, than was its wont, its colour enriched by the merest tinge of brown. The wind kissed it in little playful gusts, and the water laughed with a dimple. What a day for fishing! the water was just right.

The kirk bell became more clamorous.

It was like his luck—the Sabbath!—and a perfect fisher's day.

Would the water be in such fine fettle in the morning? He would rise at four o'clock, and see.

He crossed to the other side of the bridge and looked over. In the pool he saw three moving shadows. Beauties!—twenty pounders every one of them, if they were an ounce.

Confound it! had the kirk bell stopped?

It had, and the smith hurried on, his pace a decorous Sabbath compromise between a walk and a run.

Aggie had not waited for him at the kirk door—she was already in her pew in the “breist o’ the laft,” and the minister was already in the pulpit. As the smith tip-toed to his seat beside his wife he was painfully aware that his boots were squeaking loudly. They were squeaking so loudly that he thought at first the sound of them was Willie Shed’s voice, but when Wullie-meenie Tosh looked round at him reprovingly he knew he was the sinner. It was queer that he had not heard them squeaking as he walked along the road. Why didn’t the minister get on with his job? Like him to call attention to his lateness by waiting till he reached his seat! He sank down shame-faced beside Aggie.

The minister rose: the service began. It was not until the first psalm and the first prayer were over that the smith had regained his

composure. During the reading he looked round the kirk. The Castle pew was well filled. The Laird was ageing. That would be Captain Arbuthnot sitting next Miss Margery. A weel-set-up lad, he would make her a guid husband. Was Wullie Shed sleepin' already? Usually he didn't begin to sleep till the middle of the second prayer. Wha was the smart-looking young man sitting in Sam'l Logan's seat? He seemed very chief with Tibbie—she was passing him a peppermint. Her sweetheart, as like as no'—but wha was he?

The minister's voice impinged upon his ears:

"And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fat-fleshed and well-favoured; and they fed in a meadow."

Yon was fine fat-fleshed and weel-faured fish—clean-run anes—in the pool below the brig. They would be farther up the water the morn.

The minister's voice rose—"And Joseph said unto Pharaoh"—Sam'l's mind made a running commentary: Was Pharaoh a fisherman; was the Nile a guid stream for salmon? Hardly!—owre muckle sand in it! Gie me the Garple after a spate.

"Let us pray!" The minister's voice had sunk to a devotional tone. The second prayer was always the longest in the service—it was comprehensive, and embraced the whole parish from the old bedridden women to the new-born weans; from the Queen and "those set over us in Church and State," to the sick coo in the

beadle's byre, and the sickly kail-runts in the minister's garden; "the fruits of the earth in their due season"... "And grant us propitious weather for the ingathering of the harvest." Now that was a sensible sort o' petition provided that in answering it Providence wad use discretion. A dry day, wi' a gentle win', and a dull sky would be guid eneuch for the harvesters—it would be juist richt for fishing. Aye! richt eneuch, Willie Shed was sleeping, stelled up against a pillar. He was like a horse: he could sleep on his feet!

The prayer was over. The precentor's tuning-fork vibrated. A line birring frae the reel gaed a note like that. The congregation sang heartily if somewhat unmusically.

"You will find my text in the 41st chapter of Genesis." Aggie was refreshing herself before settling down to listen to the sermon by sniffing at her sprig of souther'-wood.

At ordinary times the smith was a good listener with a fine nose for the taint of heresy, but he was made of common clay, and—it was a perfect day for fishing. The Mavis pool would be fu' o' fish. He had never seen the water looking bonnier. "The Dusty Miller" would be worth trying.

"Fourthly—the interpretation of the dream was"—And there was yon fly he had dressed himsel'. A beauty! a "Jock Scott" was naething tae it. He had never tried it yet. Oh! if it were only the morn, at fowre o'clock!

"Sixthly—it was laid upon Joseph as the instrument of"— The shoulder hackle came from a golden pheasant's breist, and the wings were o' peacock and magpie feathers, and the body was scarlet and white 'oo'. Nae doot the Almichty micht hae created a mair striking-looking insect, but if He had it didna frequent Dalbean. Aye! it wud mak' the least inquisitive salmon rise.

"Ninthly—in the choice of Joseph as the interpreter of Pharaoh's dream we have proof of"—

Aye! he would try "The Dusty Miller" first; and if that didna mak' them rise he would try his ain beauty.

"Finally, my brethren, we must gather"—

Oh confound the meenister! there was still to come "In conclusion," and "Time will not permit of our dwelling upon all the valuable lessons which our subject is designed and fitted to teach, but"—

He looked furtively at his watch. Aggie saw him out of the corner of her eye, and put her foot firmly down on his worst corn. Her eyes were riveted on the pulpit. Fifty-five minutes by the clock. It wad rin to another quarter o' an 'oor at the least.

When the service was over the sniith did not wait to talk with any of his friends in the kirk-yard. Nor did he wait for Aggie, but hurried off, as one bent on serious business.

The wind was just right. How bonnie the

water looked! He was on the bridge. The three salmon he had seen in the pool were there no longer. They would have lots of time to reach the Mavis Pool before the morning. He had never seen the water in such fine fettle!

The folk were beginning to come, he had better be getting on.

He let himself into the house and, as his habit was, took off his Sabbath coat and slipped on his week-day one. The broth was simmering gently—it smelled good. He lifted his eyes from the pot to the wall above the fireplace where his fishing rod lay hung. It was a fine, well-balanced green—— It wasn't there! It was there last night! Now the hooks that held it were empty. He scratched his chin with his thumb, and stepped over to the eight-day clock. The gaff usually stood in the corner between the clock and the fireplace. It had disappeared!

He scratched his chin with his thumb again, and then stamped upstairs to Jamie's room. The bankets were tossed in a heap in the middle of the bed—the pillow was on the floor—Jamie had vanished.

"The wee de'il's-buckie!" he muttered. "Him an' his sair heid! I'll learn him tae break the Sabbath!"

The smith hurried downstairs and slipped through the back door. With half a dozen steps he was in the plantation.

"He'll be up at the Mavis Pool," he muttered. "I'll learn him." He started to run. The

branch of a tree, pushed roughly aside, sprang back and hit him a stinging blow on the face. He stopped and rubbed the place with his hand, and looked viciously at the tree. "The very thing," he said, when he had recovered from the smart, and taking out his knife he cut the branch off. As he hurried on he trimmed it. It was a nice supple rod—Jamie would catch it!

Now the Mavis Pool lies about a mile above the village, and is beautifully shaded. The trees in the hedge on the top of the river's bank have far-flung arms, and their shadows, when the sun is right, lay mystery on the face of the water.

On hands and knees the smith crawled up to the hedge, and peered through. Jamie was there right enough—but Jamie was a boy transfigured! The line birred through the reel—the line was taut—Jamie on tip-toe was stepping quickly down the bank. The line slackened—Jamie reeled in rapidly. The surface of the water broke—a huge fish leaped, and splashed into the water again.

"Haud up yer point, man!" yelled the smith, as he burst through the hedge and raced to his son's aid.

"Reel oot, man! reel oot!—That's it!"

A breathless moment—the fish was darting down the stream. "Keep opposite him, Jamie—keep opposite him!—reel in—he's turned!—he's coming up!"

"Keep yer line ticht!—Ah!—he's turned again. Reel oot, man! but gi'e him nae slack!"

—For guid sake dinna let him doon among the rocks or ye'll loss him—Oh! weel dune, lad!—weel dune!”

For thirty minutes by the clock the boy played the fish—his own small skill amply supplemented by the lavish instructions of his father.

“Haud yer line ticht, Jamie!”

The fish, exhausted, lay in a pool near the bank. The smith slipped down to the edge of the water, gaff in hand. Steadying himself by gripping the edge of the bank, he put one foot on a stone the top of which projected for an inch above the river. Noiselessly he slipped the gaff over the back of the fish, and with a quick jerk its point went home. A moment later the dying fish was on the bank—beating the blood-stained grass convulsively with body and tail. Two sharp blows on the head, and it lay still.

“Man! It's a graun' fish, Jamie!” exclaimed the breathless smith. Jamie was on his knees removing the hook.

“A clean-rin ane, faither! see the sea-lice roon' his gills!”

“He'll turn the scales at ten pun'? Oh! he's a beauty! What heuk had ye on, Jamie?”

The boy held it up.

“Guidsakes! the ane I dressed mase!'. This is great, Jamie!”

The smith stooped to pick up the gaff which he had thrown down on the bank. As he did so his eyes lit on the stick he had cut in the plantation. He looked at it, and then he looked at

Jamie, who was on his knees beside the fish running a finger along its steel-grey back.

The smith scratched his chin with his thumb, and swallowed. He was in a dilemma. Jamie wasna half a bad lad!—an' it was a bonnie fish, but it was the Sabbath. An' a lad wha begins by breaking the Sabbath micht end by smashing the hale Decalogue. Better kill the evil in him while there was yet time. So he picked up the stick, for a Scot with the theological traditions of Dalbean behind him may be a sport sometimes, but a Calvinist always—when it comes to executing the judgments of God upon others.

“Come here, Jamie!”

The boy approached his father, who seized him by the collar of his jacket.

“I'll learn ye tae break the Sabbath, ye wee de'il's-buckie!” And he leathered him well.

The blows stung sharply, but Jamie was in such an ecstasy of delight with his catch that his father might as well have flogged the air. He neither winced nor cried.

“That'll learn ye! ye young rascal. Breakin' the Sabbath an' yer mither's hert.” And the supple rod swished through the air in a final stroke.

His chastisement over, Jamie returned to the admiration of his catch, while his father dismantled the rod, and put it carefully in its cover.

“Here, Jamie!—you cairry the rod and the gaff I'll tak' the fish”; and the two set out for home.

They did not exchange a word till they reached the edge of the plantation. Jamie was thinking of the story he would have to tell the other boys. He must get the fish weighed—and have documentary evidence wherewith to refute anyone who might call him “Leeear!”

The smith was meditating on the terrible depravity of youth. He remembered when he was a boy—but no—he’d never been half as bad as Jamie—the young rascal! But it was a bonnie fish a’ the same. At the edge of the plantin’ the smith spoke.

“Here, ye can cairry the fish! You slip through the plantin’ an’ in at the back door, an’ tak’ care that naebody sees ye, ye Sabbath-breakin’ young rascal. I’ll gang down the main road.”

Jamie took the fish, and looked at his father. There was a twinkle in the smith’s eye that was as ointment to his son’s smarting skin.

Jamie slipped in at the back door and, leaving the fish and the tackle in the back kitchen, entered the kitchen. At the same moment his father came in at the front door.

Aggie was busy dishing the broth.

“Whaur ha’e *you* been, Jamie?”

“Mither! I’ve caught a big salmon!” answered Jamie.

“Ye’ve what?” exclaimed the shocked and incredulous Aggie.

“I’ve caught a big salmon!”

“Jamie! An’ this the Sabbath day. Dae ye

ken whaur boys gang that break the Sabbath ? ”

“ Hoots ! Aggie, leave the wean alone. I’ve leathered him weel—the young rascal. He’ll no’ break the Sabbath again in a hurry, I’ll warrant ! ”

Aggie discharged the lees in her vial of wrath upon her husband.

“ Ye’ve leathered him weel ? Ye unfeelin’ man ! Leatherin’ a boy wi’ a sair heid ! ”

When dinner was over the smith settled down in his chair by the fire for his Sabbath afternoon nap.

Jamie betook himself to the garden. He had his catechism to master. Now the catechism was a book he loathed. It was dry enough inside, but to add insult to injury the multiplication table was printed on the back of its cover—and to Jamie the multiplication table was the last straw. But the rabbit-hutch was at the bottom of the garden.

Jamie pulled some dandelion leaves and pushed them through the bars of the hutch. “ Mapp ! Mapp ! Mapp ! ” he whispered, and the mother rabbit, her nose wobbling, came out of the inner chamber with her brood. Jamie watched them nibbling for a moment, then he undid the latch and slipping in a hand seized a black-and-white baby by the ears. He cuddled it up against his neck—a soft, furry, warm, palpitating little creature, and fastened the hutch-door again. Then he sat on the grass under the

apple-tree. The catechism was on his knees: the rabbit was in his lap—a bonnie wee thing—far more to his liking than any catechism.

Late in the afternoon he heard the door open, and saw his father come out. He slipped the rabbit into his pocket.

The smith came round the garden between the box-wood borders, and sat down on the green-painted bench on the walk near the apple-tree.

Jamie's eyes were riveted on the catechism. One hand was in his pocket, fondling the warm neck of the rabbit. His lips moved slowly.

"What are ye daein', Jamie?"

"Learnin' ma catechism, faither!"

"That's a guid lad. What ane are ye at?"

"*'Effectual Callin',*" faither!"

"Ah! That's a hard ane."

"Aye, faither!"

There was a long silence. A drowsy bumble-bee boomed out of a bush and brushed past Jamie's nose. How warm the rabbit felt in his pocket!

"Did ye try ony ither fly on the fish afore ye tried mine?"

"Aye, faither! I tried baith the 'Jock Scott,' and the 'Dusty Miller,' but I never got as muckle as a rise. An' then I tried your fly, and I catched yon fish wi' the first cast."

"Wi' the first cast! Man, Jamie! that's graun'. I maun gie it a try the morn."

"Can I come wi' ye, faither?"

"Aye, Jamie!"

“Faither, wull ye buy me a wand o’ ma ain?”

“Haud yer wheest, boy. This is nae day tae talk about sic things. Get on wi’ ‘Effectual Calling.’”

Half an hour passed. Jamie had plucked a dandelion leaf and slipped it into his pocket beside the rabbit.

“Yon fish weighs twal’ an’ a half pun’s! I’ve weighed it masel’.”

“Twal an’ a half pun’s? Eh, faither! it’s a beauty!”

The church bells began to ring. The smith rose.

“Here, Jamie!” he said, “here’s a peppermint tae ye,” and he tossed a thick round lozenge, its whiteness sullied by the tobacco with which it had kept company in his pocket. Jamie put it in his mouth. The tobacco flavour lent it an additional pungency.

“Thank ye, faither!”

“Jamie,” said the smith, “ye needna come tae the kirk the nicht. If ye’re heid’s sair nae langer, I’m thinkin’ yer doup is.”

IV

GIVING THE DEVIL HIS DUE

WE are great conversationalists in Dalbean—argumentative, humorous, sometimes, if we get on to metaphysics and her twin sister theology, profound; but we get into our stride slowly, and the beginning of every conversation is unpromising. If you have seen a boy in winter-time testing the strength of the ice on a loch before venturing upon it you have a picture of our method. The boy sends a stone skimming across the ice and stands expectantly listening to its hollow, chattering rat-a-tat. If the note it gives is encouraging, and the stone does not break through, he throws another. If the ice tolerates this second challenge, he ventures to trust it with his own weight—warily at first, as one stepping on eggs, but with ever-growing boldness, and soon the ice is roaring with a crowd of youngsters like himself.

The “smiddy” was our Chamber of Debates. There we met and argued on every matter that had any bearing upon mankind—his temporal necessities, his spiritual capacities. Whatever the issue of our disputations, our method of

approach was ever the same. The smith would be busy at his furnace—one hand on the handle of the bellows, the other armed with an iron rake gathering the coal over the leaping fire, when in would walk Ezra Snubb, his cap pushed back from his bald forehead so that his face looked like a brown egg. Beyond a nod of his head, the smith would take no notice of his visitor. Ezra would brush a few nails and oddments of iron from a corner of the bench near the vice and would hoist himself up on to the place he had cleared. There he would sit, whistling through his teeth, or sometimes chewing a straw in deep meditation.

By and by Willie Shed, his ferrety eyes blinking, would keek round the doorpost, and Willie, having studied the land, would slither in. He would give a jerk of his head towards the smith, and would make for the bench where Ezra was seated. There he would seize the lever of the vice, and give it a purposeless turn and then he would pick up the oil-can and, squirting a drop of oil on the shrunken "leader" in his left palm would proceed to rub it in. He used to tell the smith his oil was far better than any he could buy. It cost him nothing.

Ezra would stop whistling, or nibbling his straw, and look at him. Then he would say "Umphm!" In the pause that ensued you could imagine Ezra and Willie watching for the stone to drop through the ice. But the ice rang true: the stone did not break it. Then

Willie would cast his pebble, in a monosyllabic—"Aye!" and if the ice still held, Ezra would put a gingerly toe upon it by ejaculating "She's a wee saft," a phrase of indefinite connotation which, applied to the weather, might mean any degree of moisture from a Scots mist to a deluge. Willie, not to be out-done in personal bravery, would also venture his weight upon the ice in some such phrase as "Aye! but it micht be waur."

The conversation begun thus cautiously would wax and wane, drawing every new-comer into its orbit. It might begin and end in the latest local gossip, but more than likely it would range far from its starting point and embrace such topics as Mr. Gladstone's Near Eastern Policy, or the Imperialism of Beaconsfield—"the auld Jew"—as the smith used to call him. Or it might start from "the free breakfast-table" of the politicians, and end with the "freedom of the will" of the metaphysicians, or, beginning with the rotation of crops, it might end with the destiny of man and the immortality of the soul. The scientist will tell you that a grain of sand lying on a mountain-top may determine whether a drop of rain falling there shall find its way into an eastern or a western ocean thousands of miles apart. So a little thing, a mere word, might determine whether our conversation should wander aimlessly on earth-bound feet among the common things of life, or soar on wings, not always very certain but usually quite self-

satisfied, into the realms of metaphysics and theology. We began with "Umphm!"—we might end in Eternity. We never registered our decisions, and we were always ready to return to a subject that we had discussed already, for we were never satisfied that we had extracted the last grain of intellectual nourishment from a meaty bone.

It was Monday evening. Now Monday evening was near enough to the Sabbath to be a night ear-marked for theology. The shortcomings of the sermon, or some statement that the fine nose of one of our pillars of orthodoxy discerned as tainted with heresy usually served as a starting-point. When the theology of Scotland began to be permeated with the rationalism of Germany our village pillars of orthodoxy were kept busy. Once, a conflagration, equal almost in intensity to that which had destroyed them, raged round the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. A young minister—in Dalbean every youth in the pulpit was suspect of heresy before he opened his mouth, and while he preached none of the orthodox relaxed their vigilance in sleep—had sought to explain the destruction of the Cities of the Plain on rational lines. He suggested that through earthquakes or subterranean explosions the whole region had been enveloped in an eruption of gas and petroleum, and that the fire which followed was a natural event. He supported his rash flight of fancy by referring to similar events that had occurred

in various corners of the globe in recent times, and he mentioned two scientific authorities by name. Whereat Joe Crombie rose from his seat under the gallery and stalked out of the kirk, banging the door behind him. Which display of orthodoxy was counted to Joseph for righteousness, and we turned a blind eye to his weakness for overstepping the bounds of sobriety at Whinburn Fair. Joe's stand for principle was duly discussed next night, and for many nights afterwards, in the "smiddy."

"I didna think it was in him," was Willie Shed's verdict on Joe.

"Whit's bred i' the bane comes oot i' the flesh," quoted the smith. "His faither leathered the Catechism intil him, an' sic an' upbringing aye tells," and the gathering nodded approval of Joe's conduct, to whom, ever afterwards, doubtful matters of orthodoxy were referred for his considered opinion.

Our respect for Joe was only equalled by our scorn for the youthful minister.

"An insult tae the Almichty I ca' it," grunted Jamie Kerr. "As though He couldna burn twa bit toons like yon without a can o' paraffin ile."

We nodded our collective heads.

"It only wanted ane thing tae mak' it down-right profanity," said Ezra Snubb.

"Whit was that?" asked the smith.

"A box o' matches," answered Ezra. Whereat Willie Shed appropriated a few more drops

from the oil-can, and Jamie Kerr spat approvingly into the cooling trough.

From which digression into the past let us return to the fact that it was Monday evening in the smiddy.

Ezra Snubb and Willie Shed had, so to say, tested the ice in the wonted fashion with the monosyllabic pebbles of non-informative speech. Jamie Kerr, lean and leather-faced, sat cross-legged in a wheelbarrow with his shoulders hunched up. He had bestowed an inch of black twist in the hollow of his left cheek, where it looked like a gum-boil. The smith had cast a sizzling horse-shoe into the water. The ice was bearing: the atmosphere was propitious, but the game had not yet begun.

Then Davie Miller entered, bent a little and leaning on his stick, his left hand lying in the hollow of his spine. He had once had a "sair back" and had found the pressure of his hand a comfort and a warning against sudden movement. The pain had disappeared long years ago; the hand remained as a memorial; he had forgotten to remove it.

Now Davie was an elder in the Free Kirk, bound, in virtue of his office, if for no other reason, to be a regular church attender.

The smith greeted him.

"Aye, Davie," he said, and Davie, with a nod, took his seat upon the anvil.

It was Jamie Kerr who started it.

"I hear, Davie, ye had a stranger in your kirk yesterday?"

"Aye!" answered Davie. "A young man frae Edinbury."

"What kin' o' haun was he at the job?" asked Willie Shed, who was still rubbing the smith's oil into his palm.

"Weel! he micht hae been waur. Nae doot he'll improve," answered the elder, willing, though by no means eager, to judge youth leniently.

"An' what kin' o' fodder did he gi'e ye?" asked the smith, wiping his hands on his apron.

"At the mornin' diet he preached on the killin' o' Abel by his brither Cain; in the afternoon he took for his subject the Parable o' the Guid Samaritan," replied Miller.

At this moment Peter Strang came in, his coat turned up to his ears, for his thin blood was chilled by the night air. He took his place near the furnace.

Jamie Kerr moved his plug of tobacco with his tongue into the hollow of his right cheek.

"Baith weel-worn subjects. Had he ony oreeginality in his application?" he said.

"Never min' aboot the application. That's aye saft-feedin' for bairns. What aboot the body of his disceorse, Elder. Was he soun'?" asked the smith.

"I had ma ears cocked tae catch ony heresy," answered Miller, "but as his subjects werena

doctrinal he was in nae great danger, an' I heard naething at which I could tak' offence."

"Hoo did he handle his mornin' subjick?" asked Ezra, hoisting himself into a more comfortable seat on the bench. "Did he say ocht about oreeginal sin? Did he mention the de'il?"

"Noo that I think o't he mentioned nayther."

The smith gasped, then took a breath so deep that the strap at the back of his waistcoat burst.

"He preached on the murder o' Abel by his brither Cain, an' never mentioned the de'il or oreeginal sin?" he said slowly, as one stricken with astonishment and struggling to comprehend. "I shouldna hae thocht it possible."

"Anything's possible i' the pulpit nooadays," said Willie Shed. "Hoo did he explain the thing ava'?"

"Oh, he said," answered the elder, "that the incident presented us wi' a beautiful example o' the growth o' sin and the hereditary transmission o' evil tendencies."

"The what?" exclaimed the smith.

"He pointed out," continued Miller, who was warming to his work, "that deceit and disobedience in the parents micht be followed by waur things, sic as jealousy and murder in the bairns, and he talked a lot aboot heredity."

"Heredity! Heredity!" interrupted Peter Strang. "I'm no quite clear whit it is. We hear nocht o'ti' the Cameronian Kirk, an' there's

nae word o't i' the Catechism. What is it ony-way?"

"Oh! I'll tell ye," exclaimed Willie Shed impulsively. "Did ye keep rabbits whan ye were a boy?"

"Aye!" replied Peter.

"Weel! if ye cross a black rabbit wi' a white ane the young anes will be some black, some white, an' some spotted. The spotted anes are heredity."

Having delivered himself, Willie Shed picked up the oil "pourie" again.

The smith's eye was on him.

"Pit doon that 'pourie,' Wullie—ile costs money. Ye're an ignorant sumph; ye dinna ken what heredity is, ava'."

"Weel! what is it?" asked Willie.

"Heredity," said the smith slowly, "is the name gi'en by professors, wha dinna ken what they mean, tae something that rins in families that they canna unnerstaun'."

"I see," said Peter. "I see! It soun's owre like heresy tae be worth believin' in! For my ain pairt, I prefer the de'il."

The smith unfastened his apron with an angry pull at its cord, and hung it on a nail behind the door.

"I agree wi' ye, Peter! It's a bad day for Dalbean noo that we never hear the de'il mentioned frae the pulpit," he said.

Ezra Snubb and Willie Shed nodded approval.

"Preachin's no' what it was," said Willie.

"It's far owre saft. Noo whan I was a boy I sat under a proper minister—auld Dr. Gray o' Drumlockhart. He wasna what ye would ca' an eloquent preacher—but he had a warm hert for the de'il. He never preached a sermon or let a Sabbath pass without mentionin' him mair than aince wi' very considerable respect. An' he didna show he was feared o' him by ca'in' him fancy names sic' as Apollyon, Beelzebub, Belial, or the Prince o' Darkness. Na! Na! He juist ca'ed him plain Devil. I min' hoo my faither used tae hotch aboot in his sate, like a waukrife wean wi' the colic till the minister wad mention the de'il. Then he would settle down in his corner an' gang fast asleep, content that a' was weel."

"I was brocht up on the same fodder, Willie," said the smith. "It made men," and he sinote his great chest with a heavy hand.

"Ah, but!"—said the elder soothingly, "times hae changed since the auld days. As oor ain minister said tae me a fortnicht back, men hae come tae a new knowledge and ye canna scourge fowk intae heaven wi' the whip o' fear."

"That's just whit I was sayin'," answered the smith. "Times hae changed, an' for the waur. Nae de'il tae tempt men! nae hell for sinners! nae wunner the Kirk is losin' its grip."

"It maun be some time sin' we had a proper sermon o' the guid auld kind i' the auld kirk," said Ezra.

"As far as I recollect," said Willie, "the last

was aboot ten year sin'. Ye min' the Hielan' minister frae Inverness?"

"Fine!" answered the smith. "He kent the stuff we needed. He branded us wi' oreeginal sin: he ca'ed us spawn o' Satan and he shook us owre the pit till the women's teeth began to rattle and some of the bairns took tae greetin'. Yon was somethin' like a sermon."

"Aye!" said Ezra.

"But there couldna be muckle speeritual edification in a sermon like that," said the elder, shaking his head sadly.

"Weel!" said the smith, "if there was little speeritual edification in what he said, there was some practical guid cam' oot o't. Davie Agnew kept sober for the best pairt o' a month, an' mair than ane young man pit in the banns tae the edification, I hae little doot, o' mair than ane lassie that was gettin' gey anxious."

"That was a' tae the guid," said the elder, "but dae ye think the warnin' would last?"

"Hoo could ye expect it tae last if it wasna repeated?" asked Peter.

"Aye! that's it," said Ezra. "When the wud's hard an' cross-grained it tak's mair than ae knock o' the hammer tae drive a nail in."

"A very guid illustration frae yer ain job," said the smith. "Tae my way o' thinkin' Dalbean would be nane the waur o' being shaken owre the pit maybe twice a year. But no! that never happens nowadays. We're far owre polite tae mention the de'il; an' oor noses are

owre fine tae be affronted wi' the smell o' brimstane."

"It's an awfu' slicht on the de'il," said Jamie. "Nae wunner he's fleein' roon' the pairish wi' his dander up seekin' whom he may devour!"

"I wunna hear that!" said the elder testily. "The moral and speeritual condition o' the parish was never better than it is the day; the de'il's no stravaigin' in it."

"That's as may be," answered the smith, "but it wad be even better if we heard mair aboot him, an' less aboot heredity. I dinna haud wi' heredity ava'! Tae mak' a respectable sinner, gie me the de'il every time."

"I agree wi' ye there!" said Willie.

Jamie Kerr turned his plug of tobacco over again. "In the upbringin' o' weans," he said, "heredity is a dangerous doctrine. It robs the de'il o' ony credit, an' it pits an awfu' lot o' disgrace on a bairn's faither."

"Man Jamie—ye've hit the nail on the heid," exclaimed the smith. "Hoo can ony bairn thole his licks wi' a reasonable degree o' satisfaction if he's been telt frae the pulpit that his faither or maybe his grandfaither was the forbear o' his wickedness?"

"It's maist upsettin' tae ony parental control," said Ezra Snubb. "When I boxed the lugs o' oor Charlie for whustlin' on the Sabbath day, the young rascal had the cheek tae ask, 'Did ye never dae it yersel', faither?'"

"Ye see!" said Peter, "the effect on the

young min' o' heresy i' the pulpit. We've nocht like that amang the Cameronians."

"Heredity may be a' richt in a stud-book," said the smith, "but in judgin' o' human nature I wud aye allow a bit for oreeginal sin, an' a lot for the workin's o' the de'il."

"I agree wi' ye!" said Willie. "The de'il's something ye can get a grip on. Heredity's nae mair than a puff o' win'."

"A theology withoot the de'il," said Ezra, "is like a chair wantin' a leg—a very puir thing tae stan' on."

The smith nodded approval.

"Better stick tae the de'il an' oreeginal sin," he said. "Come awa' in an' hae a drap o' the Auld Kirk. Preachin' may hae lost its fire—it hasna."

V

THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

HALF-WAY down the Wynd lived Miss Wilhelmina Tosh, the dressmaker. Her Christian name presented difficulties, so Dalbean corrupted it into Wulliemeenie. But, as a rule, as a tribute to her dignity and as the easiest way of avoiding a pit-fall, she was referred to as Miss Tosh. If you were wise in the ways of women you did not require to read the inscription "Miss Tosh, Dressmaker," on the brass plate on the door to know that the house was inhabited by a spinster. The polished brass knocker, the polished handle, and the polished plate on the door all cried aloud that an old maid lived within—and if further proof were needed it was forthcoming from the fuchsia on the round table in the window, between the prim white curtains, and the over-fed, benevolent-looking tabby that often sat on the table beside the flower-pot, blinking sleepily at the children as they passed.

Miss Tosh was a little wisp of a woman, with a large, round, whey-coloured face. Her eyes were bulbous, with irises of greyish green. Her chin fell away suddenly into her neck, and her nose was insignificant, so that, when her face was in repose, she looked like a demure and somewhat chastened cat. But let me do her

no injustice : she was not a cat, but a mouse by nature. She was gentleness itself : she had no claws. She had a good word for everyone except herself, for she was a woman with a past. What that past may have been we were left to wonder. That it had been awful enough there could be little doubt, for it had left its seal in the quiet sadness of her face and the sadness of her voice. If you have heard the melancholy plaint of a bird whose nest has been robbed you have heard Miss Tosh's voice—subdued, dolorous, charged with sorrow. She, who loved children, was never able to understand why children did not like her. It was her voice that repelled them : they heard the pain in it, and were afraid.

The blot on her life was there before she came to Dalbean. It belonged to a past of which we knew nothing. While she lived among us her walk and conversation were such as no man dare challenge. She was propriety in being, piety in the flesh, and, if she had only been able to hold her tongue, no one would ever have guessed that her feet, large as they were, had once strayed upon the broad highway that leads to destruction. But she could not hold her tongue, even when the left corner of her mouth was full of pins. A "tryin' on" was usually her appointed hour for self-revelation and self-judgment.

"Yes, Miss Grant ! I think it will staun' half an inch less in the waist." A pin would find its way dexterously from her mouth to the

waistband. "That's better! Are the flounces tae yer likin'? Aye, it's a bonnie goon, an' bonnie ye'll look in it!"

Miss Grant would turn herself round before the long glass in the wardrobe door, her neck on the stretch, her eyes straining into the angles of their sockets, to catch a glimpse of her back.

"Eh, lassie! lassie! ye look braw: but tak' the advice o' a wumman that kens, an' as the Guid Buik says—'avoid the very appearance o' evil.'"

Miss Grant tossed her pretty head.

"I dinna unnerstaun' what ye mean, Miss Tosh. There can be nae mair evil in likin' a bonnie goon than there is in makin' ane, an' everyane says," she added, to atone for the sting in her last words, "that ye're a very clever dressmaker."

A smile, strangled in the birth, flickered for an instant on the dressmaker's pale face. She drew a little handkerchief from her bosom, and furtively dabbed her eyes.

"There's nae sin in bein' bonnie, there's nae sin in lookin' braw; but, lassie, if I were as young as ye are, an' could leeve ma life owre again, I'd be a better wumman. I'm only speakin' for yer guid; it's laid upon me tae speak, an' warn the young. I'm the chief amang sinners."

When Maisie Grant called on her friend Peggy Calder to let her see the new frock, and the frock had been duly admired, she dropped her voice to a whisper:

“Peggy! Miss Tosh has an awfu’ secret.”

The announcement did not produce the expected flash of interrogation from eyes and open lips.

“What did she tell ye, Maisie?”

“Oh! she telt me naething—but she said she was the chief o’ sinners.”

“That’s exactly what she said tae me when I was tryin’ on yesterday.”

“What dae ye think she can hae dune, Peggy? It maun hae been something awfu’ tae gie yer yon sad face, and the mournfu’ voice.”

“I couldna say; but when she telt me I noticed a queer thing. When she said ‘I’m the chief amang sinners,’ the mournfu’ note went oot o’ her voice, an’ there was a kin’ o’ ring about it,” said Peggy, who was a young woman not without discernment.

“Noo that ye mention it, I noticed the same masel’. What can she hae dune?”

Between them the two girls had but a scanty knowledge of the depravity of which man or woman may be capable.

“I wunner!” said Peggy. “I wunner!” answered Maisie, and Miss Tosh became clothed with the trappings of mystery.

If to proclaim oneself a sinner publicly is to find ease of conscience the dressmaker might well have slept soundly, for she was ever ready to avow herself outcast, utterly beyond the pale. She began with the younger of her patrons; later she denounced herself to their mothers,

who, somewhat awestruck that this daughter of Belial should have taken up her abode in our law-abiding and, comparatively, a God-fearing community, confided their awesome knowledge to their husbands. Most of the men laughed: though Ezra Snubb, knocking the ashes from his pipe against the jamb of the kitchen fireplace said—"We'd better keep an e'e on her," and added: "If she chairges mair for yer goon than the Whinburn dressmaker, it'll no' be safe tae hae dealin's wi' her." But though Ezra, and others of that ilk, kept an eye on her they never detected anything in her conduct that called for criticism.

She confided in the minister. He, having the cure of our souls in his hands and in his heart, was all sympathy.

"Such tenderness of conscience as you show," he said, "is in itself a proof that your sin is not unto death. The mercies of God are new every morning," and then he prayed with her.

She thanked him in her plaintive voice, and he imagined he had given her spiritual comfort, but she continued still to revile herself to all who would listen. She made a confidant of every minister who came, on occasion, to fill the pulpit. She would tap gently at the vestry door after the morning service and, on invitation, would trip timidly into the little bare room, and when the beadle had taken his departure, she would explain her errand. Claspings her gloved

hands she would say—"I wish to thank you for the beautiful words of grace you spoke this morning. They were as healing balm on my wounded soul. I am the chief of sinners."

One such minister, eager to pluck brands from the burning, took her name and address, and for many months afterwards wrote her long and sympathetic letters full of quotations from the poets and the mystics. At Christmas time he sent her a daintily bound copy of *The Imitation*, which became her most precious possession. But his interest in her soul, or at least his epistolary enthusiasm, snuffed out suddenly when he took unto himself a wife. He is now the minister of a swell church in the West-end of Glasgow. His crowded congregation is composed chiefly of women, mostly spinsters. The particularly frothy brand of Gospel which he dispenses makes no appeal to the shrewd business men of that hard-headed city.

Every year, in the early spring, there appeared an advertisement in the columns of the *Whinburn Gazette*. Its wording never varied:

"Miss Tosh, 5, The Wynd, Dalbean, begs to inform the nobility and gentry of Dalbean and neighbourhood that she has returned from her annual visit to the West-end Emporiums of the Metropolis bringing with her a full range of the latest fashions. An inspection of her show-room is invited."

Whenever the carrier read this announcement he laughed.

"A fu' range o' the latest fashions frae London! Sall! that's the proud name for half a dizzen dress lengths marked doon at a clearance sale in Glesca'; an' twa or three dressmakin' papers.—I ken! Show-room! Losh! that's only her best bedroom!"

In this annual visit to London Ezra Snubb scented her sin. He said as much when Wullie-meenie's turn came, in one of the cracks at the smiddy.

"I wouldna wunner if that awfu' sin o' hers has somethin' tae dae wi' her veesits tae London. They tell me yon's no' a safe place for a single wumman."

"Aye, Ezra!" said Willie Shed. "What think ye it can be?"

Ezra shook his head. If the matter at issue had been an abstruse point in theology he might have ventured an opinion. But a mystery in a woman's life—well! his imagination alternately ran riot or stood aghast. The mystery baffled him.

"I've sometimes wondered," said Willie, who, being a stonemason, was accustomed to solid facts, "if it can be a bairn?"

The smith laughed. "A bairn! If it were twa she couldna mak' mair fuss: misca'in hersel' for everythin' that's ill. What's a bairn, onyway? a sma' thing tae mak' a fuss o' in Dalbean at ony rate, whaur sic things hae been heard o' before, eh, Ezra?"

Ezra pushed his cap back from his forehead.

Inspiration had come to him. "I wunner if she's Madeline Smith?"

Willie Shed started. His ferrety eyes stopped blinking.

"Man Ezra! that's a bricht notion. As like as no. Aye!" and he sniffed.

"Hoots!" said the smith. "There's nae-thin' in that. She's the wrang age, an' she's no' bonnie eneuch. Besides, if she were, she's tholed her assize."

"I wunner!" said Ezra. "I wunner!" echoed the stonemason, both unwilling to abandon a suggestion that had interesting possibilities.

A day came when Fortune placed Miss Tosh in the smith's hands. Her cat was ill; it had begun to refuse its food. She brought it to Sam'l, who, being skilful with horses, had acquired a reputation as an authority on the ailments of all four-footed creatures. He took the overfed tabby from its basket and set it on the scarred bench near the vice, running critical fingers through its fur.

"Refusin' its meat, did ye say? Nae wunner! It's that stawed it can eat nae mair. Hoo often dae ye feed it?"

Miss Tosh retailed its dietary.

"Losh, wumman! That's mair than I eat masel'. Can ye no' see ye're fleecin' in the face o' Providence spoilin' yer cat that wey? The Almichty made cats tae fend for theirsels. If it were a bairn ye couldna pamper it mair. Leave it wi' me—I'll cure it."

Miss Tosh picked up her cat indignantly, and pressed her cheek against its head. "Puir Tiddles!" she whispered, "I winna let him starve ye!"

The broad body of the smith was between the little dressmaker and the door. There was a twinkle in his eye—which Jamie knew well enough.

"Leavin' cats oot o' the question, Miss Tosh, there's a maitter on which I should like some licht. What's this awfu' sin o' yours we hear sae muckle o'?"

The dressmaker drew herself to her full height; the top of her bonnet reached the level of the smith's elbow. She raised her right hand in the air.

"My sin wull no' be revealed till the Great Day!" she said defiantly.

"Hoots, wumman! ye flatter yersel'. The Almichty wull be far owre thrang that day wi' the big sinners like Claverse, an' Lag, an' a wheen mair tae hae ony time for a wee dressmaker frae a place like Dalbean. He'll keep the sma' fry like yersel' for a slack day at the hinner en' o' Eternity, an' ye'll juist hae tae bide His time."

Miss Tosh dodged under the smith's elbow and escaped from the smiddy. "A godless, anfeelin' monster!" she confided to 'Tiddles in the basket, with tears in her eyes.

But her sin was revealed ere the Great Assize by her own lips to her own undoing. Wullie-mecnie fell ill. She believed herself to be dying.

She sent for the doctor at night, and for the minister in the morning. As the minister came up the wynd from her house he met the doctor going down to it. The doctor halted his gig.

"Good morning, doctor! I've just come from your patient, Miss Tosh. What did you think of her last night? Is she very ill?"

The doctor smiled. "More frightened than ill, I think. She should be all right in a day or two."

"That's what I thought," said the minister. "She thinks she's dying!"

"Rubbish!" said the doctor. "Dying folk make less fuss," and the gig drove on.

As the doctor stood on Miss Tosh's doorstep waiting to be admitted he looked up the wynd. The minister, his dignity thrown to the winds, was doubled up with laughter in the middle of the street. The doctor was puzzled.

Later in the morning Mrs. Armstrong was summoned to Miss Tosh's bedside. Now Mrs. Armstrong was the dressmaker's bosom friend, and when she let herself out of the door after her visit, those who saw her said that her face was set. In her stern aspect they saw the struggle of a brave woman to keep her emotions under control: and they shook wise heads—"Wulliemeenie maun be gey serious: did ye see Mary Armstrong's face?"

When Robin Armstrong came home from school his mother gave him a penny and two letters.

“ Rin awa', Robin, an' tak' thae letters tae Mrs. Broon and Mrs. Ferguson: an' wait for an answer. Dinna let them fa'—an' dinna spend yer penny till ye've brocht the answers, or ye'll be dirtyin' yer face: there's a guid boy!”

Robin ran off, and in due time brought back messages that Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Ferguson would be pleased to drink tea with his mother the following afternoon.

So it came to pass that Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Ferguson were seated in the room above Mrs. Armstrong's shop about four of the clock next day.

Mrs. Armstrong had excused herself.

“ Ye'll forgi'e me if I leave ye for a meenute tae see what that lass is daein'. Servants are no' what they were.”

“ That's so!” answered both guests in one breath, knowing full well that their hostess was excusing herself and trying to deceive them, as in like case they would have excused themselves and tried to deceive her, and was making for the kitchen to prepare the “ drappit scones.”

In her absence Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Ferguson kept up a desultory conversation while their eyes wandered critically round the room, appraising, registering.

“ As I was sayin', Mrs. Ferguson,” said Mrs. Brown, her large ear-rings shaking as her jaws moved, “ the bairns are gettin' far owre muckle hame wark. They should teach them mair in the schule ”—but as she spoke she was thinking

of other things and the thought in her mind was—"Humph! shop breid on the table! Like Mary Armstrong tae ape the gentry."

"I agree wi' ye, Mrs. Broon. Noo there's oor wee Mary—what wi' her coonts, an' her history an' geography an' the rest o't, the bairn's never dune till the back o' eicht o'clock." She moved a plate on the table as though unwittingly, and her quick eyes registered an impression, her critical mind made an uncomplimentary deduction—"Ah! twa iron marks! Mary Armstrong is no' the guid housewife she'd like us tae beleeve."

Mrs. Brown was toying with a corner of the table-cloth between her finger and thumb. The thought in her mind was—"It's no rale damask, ava'. It's half cotton—an' her keeps a draper's shop!" but her lips said:

"I've mair than half a min' tae speak tae the dominie aboot it."

By the time Mrs. Armstrong returned from "seein' what the lass was daein'," though her face was flushed as though it had been touched by the fire, and her gown was a little ruffled as though it had been tucked round her waist, there was nothing in her room that had not come in for its share of unvoiced but caustic criticism. Mrs. Brown's bony fingers had even discovered dust behind a picture.

Close on the heels of her mistress came the maid, panting heavily as she edged, crablike, into the room, shoving the door open with a

plump shoulder. The tray she bore was heavily laden. She dumped it clumsily on the table, so that the spoons clattered in the saucers, the teacups reeled like men drunken, and the tea-pot ejected a gush of steaming tea over the "drappit scones."

"Annie!" cried Mrs. Armstrong sternly; while a look that spoke volumes passed between her two guests.

Annie in a fluster, and with much noise, transferred the contents of her tray to the table and hurried out, banging the door behind her.

"Wull ye tak' this chair, Mrs. Broon; and this, Mrs. Ferguson?" said Mrs. Armstrong, waving a hand to right and left, as she seated herself at the top of the table.

The meal proceeded leisurely. A tea-party in Dalbea is a function not to be hurried through. The hostess pressed her guests to do justice to her viands: "Pit tae yer haun's, leddies!" The guests protested politely but allowed themselves to be over-persuaded—not once, but many times. The large tea-pot responded to every demand; the flow of gossip ran steadily.

It was while she was pouring herself out her fourth cup of tea, to keep her guests in countenance, that Mrs. Armstrong recognised the opportunity for which she had been lying in wait.

Innocently enough Mrs. Ferguson gave her her cue:

"Hae ye heard hoo Miss Tosh is?" she asked.

Mrs. Armstrong set the tea-pot down firmly.

Her eyes glinted; the angles of her mouth curved cynically.

"Miss Tosh!" she hissed—"Miss Tosh! The Jezebel! I ken her secret!"

Mrs. Brown's head jerked forward like the head of a hen that has caught sight of some rare dainty in the farmyard. Mrs. Ferguson was startled into rigidity, her eyes staring, her nose a mark of exclamation in the plain record of her face.

Neither spoke. They waited on tenter-hooks. Mrs. Armstrong looked at them both with ill-concealed triumph.

"Aye! I've found her oot. She's a shameless woman! She's no fit tae leeve in Dalbean!"

Mrs. Brown's curiosity could stand no more. The bugles in her bonnet sounded an alarm. Her ear-rings wagged. "What is it?" she asked in a hoarse whisper, swallowing nervously.

"I promised no' tae tell—but on reflection I've decided that public duty should come before private compacts, an' I'm no gaun' tae haud ma tongue!—Oh! she's a bad ane!"

She looked at Mrs. Ferguson, whose mouth was gaping as though she heard with it rather than her ears, and then at Mrs. Brown, who was leaning forward, elbows on table, her "company mainners" forgotten in her eagerness to miss no word of the expected revelation. And Mary Armstrong sighed contentedly; it was a dramatic moment in her life. She spoke slowly and solemnly as does a judge when the black-cap

lies on his wig. "Her awfu' secret is this: When she was a lass o' twenty she gie'd a conversation sweetie tae a young minister at a Sabbath schule trip—an' on it was the words 'Do you love me?'"

When the heavens crash with thunder and the earth shakes there follows a silence. That silence filled Mary Armstrong's room. She sat rigid, proud, her eyes gleaming—drinking in with satisfaction the looks of mingled annoyance and surprise that filled the faces of her guests.

Mrs. Ferguson swallowed twice, and sighed; then retrieved her voice, that had sunk into her ample stomach with her first swallow.

"Was that a'?" she gasped.

"Aye! that was a'," answered Mrs. Armstrong.

Mrs. Brown jumped up from her chair; her hands were clenched: her teeth set. "The wicked, shameless woman! tae keep the hale o' Dalbean deceived a' these years by a lee! The chief of sinners!—haugh! It's a scandal, a fair disgrace; an' us thinkin' her sin was something rale respectable; something worth makin' a mystery o'. Oh! I could wring her skinny neck!"

"She's little better than a harridan!" said Mrs. Ferguson, who was not very certain of what the word meant, though she thought it was something sufficiently unpleasant to apply justly to a woman so abandoned.

"It's an unspeakable insult tae the community," said Mrs. Armstrong. "There's nae word

bad eneuch for it. She's nae better than a livin' lee."

The three women shook their heads severely. The bugles in Mrs. Brown's bonnet rattled a volley over the open grave of Miss Tosh's reputation.

"She's no' fit tae mix wi' dacent fowk," she cried. "Makin' a mountain o' iniquity oot o' a wee thing like yon! Oh! the Jezebel!" And she clenched her hands in the air as though they were round the throat of the chief among sinners.

"Aince she's better," said Mrs. Armstrong vindictively, "I'll deal wi' her. There's nae word bad eneuch for her; but I'll mak' Dalbean owre hot for her!"

The three women sank back in their chairs exhausted by their vituperation. Mrs. Armstrong swung round and took a smelling-bottle from a drawer in the side-board. She sniffed it, and passed it to Mrs. Ferguson, who sniffed until her eyes watered. Mrs. Brown wiped her forehead with her table-napkin. She had forgotten her handkerchief—but hoped that her hostess was too occupied with her own emotions to notice. There was a long silence. Even a bull-necked pugilist takes time to recover from a knock-out blow. At last Mrs. Ferguson spoke:

"What bothers me!" she said quietly, "is why she should hae made sae muckle oot o' naething, claimin' a reputation for depravity that she had nae title tae."

“ Oh ! she juist wanted tae mak’ a sensation,” answered Mrs. Brown, with an angry toss of her head.

“ I imagine,” said Mrs. Armstrong, who knew her sex, “ that the bottom o’ the hale thing was that, her being an auld maid, she liked tae think aboot it ! ”

Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Ferguson suddenly came to life again.

“ Ye’ve pit yer finger on the spot, Mary ! ” they said in one breath.

VI

“MASTER IN HIS OWN HOUSE”

THE smith was busy mending Acre-end's old harrow, when the smiddy doorway was darkened suddenly, and Andrew Stott shuffled in. Andrew was the miller—a loosely built, weak-lipped man with unimpressive grey eyes set in a white face. He was possessed by a chronic fidgetiness. The verdict of Dalbean upon him was “as restless as a whitruck but no' half as gleg.”

He did not speak to the smith, but with his hands clasped behind his back, and his thumbs revolving round each other, paced up and down the smiddy floor.

The smith went on with his work: one eye on the harrow, one on Andrew. At last the miller stopped beside the anvil. The smith looked up.

“Umphm!” said the miller.

“Is it as bad as that?” asked the smith, with understanding.

“Aye! the lum's reekin' again.”

Which things are as Arabic to the uninitiated, but plain as the Queen's English to us who understood.

They meant that the miller's wife, who was a

termagant, as we all knew (Willie Shed said she had a tongue like an ether) was in one of her tantrums, and the miller had had to flee her wrath, as many a time before. In such straits he always sought refuge in the smiddy :—there was something reassuring and protective about the smith's robust manliness.

The smith turned the harrow, and took a measurement with his steel ruler. Then he picked up a bar of iron with his pincers and slipped it into the fire. As he seized the handle of the bellows, his eyes were fixed on the teeth of the harrow.

"They're a' alike," he said.

"As sib' as peas," answered the miller, who followed the smith's gaze. Yet neither was speaking of the things he was looking at; it was woman, not harrow's teeth, that filled their minds.

The blast roared through the furnace.

"I hope I'm no sayin' what a' shouldna—an' me a God-fearin' man," said the miller, "but I sometimes think it's a peety the Almichty ever made them."

"Weel! it was, in a manner o' speakin', an efterthocht," said the smith.

"Puir Adam!" said the miller feelingly.

"Aye! he was a' richt till he got a wife. Then he hadna tae look for his troubles. They cam' fast eneuch, Andra."

"As though a wife wasna trouble eneuch, without onything else, Sam'l."

"But they hae their guid points," ventured the smith.

"Some o' them hae, nae doot. But in the bulk they're bad. Read history."

The smith seized the pincers and withdrew the iron bar. He looked at it critically and replaced it in the fire.

"On a matter o' this kind history's a puir guide. We hear lots aboot the rale bad anes, because they helped tae mak' history; we hear nocht o' the guid anes that only made hames—an' there maun hae been lots o' them."

"Nae doot! nae doot!" assented the miller. "But if ye could hae speired at their husbands they could hae telt ye something. As like as no' maist o' them had a gey hard time. Read history again. What for hae men through the ages aye been keen tae get awa' tae the wars? The women thocht it was for glory! The men kent they went for peace."

The smith placed the glowing bar on the anvil, and struck it several blows, turning it this way and that. Then he looked at it approvingly, and threw it into the cooling trough.

"Ye're awfu' bitter, Andra," he said.

"Guid kens I've reason," answered the miller.

"Naebody but masel' kens the life she leads me."

"We've heard rumours," said the smith.

"But man, as like as no' the faut's yer ain. Ye dinna ken hoo tae manage her."

"Thenk ye for naething," said Andrew with an upward jerk of his chin. "It's easy talkin'."

The smith raised his eyes to the smoky rafters of the smiddy, and was apparently counting a row of horse-shoes that straddled along the nearest one. He spoke quietly.

"Andra! every mairrit man has his ain weird tae dree; it's a discipline laid upon a' his sons because Adam was saft and let Eve tak' her ain wey. But a man can mak' his discipline waur if he disna ken hoo tae manage his wife." He kicked Acre-end's harrow with his iron-tipped toe. "She'll pit ye under the harrow richt eneuch. The wise man'll see that the harrow has nae teeth."

"I wush ye'd tell me hoo?" said the miller.

The smith lowered his eyes from their study of the horse-shoes and sat straddle-legs across the anvil.

"I'll tell ye hoo I manage," he said.

"I'm listenin'," answered the miller.

"Weel! we've first got tae recognise that every woman is like yon P'ool in Jerusalem we've heard aboot—likely tae be troubled at times. She'll no ken hersel' what's the maitter wi' her, an' that bein' so Guid kens nae man wull ken, tho' I hae ma opeenion that it's just the de'il, wi' his tail twisted roon' the apple-tree, whis-perin' in Eve's lug owre again."

"Ye're a great believer in the de'il," said Andrew.

"So should every mairrit man be," answered the smith. "Weel! as I was sayin', when a man sees the waters beginning tae be troubled that's the time for him tae clear oot."

"But that's cowardice—no worthy o' a self-respectin' man," protested the miller.

"Naething o' the kind, Andra. Its guid releegion—and soun' common sense. The de'il's at yer wife's lug; gie him a wide berth—or she'll be at baith o' yours. Get oot o' the wife's road, till the storm blaws by."

"Wi' my wife, though," said the miller, "the storm disna blaw by in a minute. An' if I'm no' there tae catch its fu' strength, she'll keep a blast or twa tae gie me when I come back."

"Man, Andra! she maun be a terror."

"That's what I'm tellin' ye, Sam'l!" said the miller.

"Weel! ye'll hae tae break her in. Aggie was like that till I trained her—an' noo, as a' body kens, I'm maister in my ain hoose."

As he made this bold statement the smith's booming voice sank, as though he did not wish the walls to hear it, and he looked furtively over his shoulder through the door. He raised his voice again. "Of course, in your case, Andra, there's a great disadvantage: ye've gi'en in tae her sae lang, an' she's had the whup-hand o' ye sae mony years that it'll be a hard job tae pit her in her richt place." He looked the miller up and down somewhat sadly, and shook his head, "Aye! ye'll hae yer wark cut oot!"

"Ye needna shake yer heid, an' look at me yon gait," said the miller, bridling a little.

"I'm as fit tae be maister in my ain hoose as you are in yours!"

"Aye! but fit doesna aye mean able. Hooever, we digress, as the meenister wad say. Let's stick tae the point—we're no' in the pulpit. As I was sayin', ye'll hae tae drive her on a ticht rein."

"Hoo should I begin?" asked the miller.

"Has she ever ony guid days—or is she aye in a tantrum?" asked the smith.

"Tae dae her justice, she's no' aye in a tantrum, but she's aye on a hair-trigger, Sam'l."

"Weel, ye'll hae tae be judeecious. Exercise caution. Watch her like a cat watchin' a moose, an' when ye think ye've caught her at her saftest, pit yer fit on her neck."

"But hoo, man?"

"Fin' faut wi' her aboot something!"

"But that'll only mak' her flee up!"

"Aye! but be the first tae flee up yersel'. She aye gets ye at a disadvantage by startin' the flytin'. You begin it yersel'; get your angry word in afore she's ready for it. She may strike back wi' her tongue—but being surprised she'll likely hit wild. So get in anither hefty ane yersel', an' dinna stop yer tongue-lashin' till ye hae her greetin'."

"But that wad be cruel!" protested the miller.

The smith shrugged his great shoulders.

"There would be nae tyrants, Andra, if

there were nane willin' tae be slaves. If ye like yer chains, just stick tae them."

"But I'd dae ocht tae be free."

"Like me, Andra?"

"Aye!—like you. You're ane o' the lucky anes, Sam'l!"

The smith scratched his chin with his thumb.

"I'm only lucky because I was wise in the beginnin'. I began as I meant tae end."

"Maybe that's whaur I went wrang!" admitted the miller.

"As like as no'. Ye see, Andra, women are like bairns or horses or ony ither kin' o' cattle. If they think they can hae their ane way they'll tak' it; but they aye ken their maister. Shall I tell ye hoo tae break her in?"

"I wush ye would!" said the miller.

"Speakin' as ane that kens horses I wad remind ye that every filly kens if the man haudin' the reins is feared or no'. It's an instinct—an' women hae got it tae. Weel! ye've got tae rid yersel' o' a' fear."

"Wha's feared?" demanded the miller angrily.

"I was makin' nae charges; but I've aye noticed ye tak' shelter in the smiddy if the lum's reekin' at hame," answered the smith, with a twinkle in his eye. "Hoover! that may be because ye like my company."

"Aye, that's what I come for, Sam'l."

"Weel, it's bad policy. Nae doot yer wife thinks ye're runnin' awa' frae her: an' ony

self-respectin' wumman wi' that idea wad exercise her poo'er reg'larly, juist for her ain satisfaction forbye keepin' her man in what she thinks is his richt place. Ye've got tae let her see ye dinna care a crack o' yer fingers for her tantrums. Ye've got tae thole her tongue. Haud yer ain if ye canna gi'e her better than she's gie'n you; but keep a stiff upper lip, and cairry yer chin in the air, an' dinna rin awa'."

"But ye dinna ken what she's like, Sam'l! She's a perfect de'il whan she begins."

The smith patted the miller on the shoulder, provoking a cloud of white dust.

"She'll get tired o' flytin' if she canna provoke ye. An' whan she's had her say, an' stops for breath, juist answer her quately in a saft tired voice, wi' sorrow, but nae anger in it."

"But that'll only make her waur, Sam'l!"

"It may at first, but it'll puzzle her. Ye see past experience wull hae led her tae expect that ye'd either rin awa', or answer her wi' anger. She'll no ken what tae mak' o't."

"Weel, and what then?" asked the miller.

"Dae ye think she's fond o' ye yet?" asked the smith.

"I'm sure o' that!" replied the miller confidently.

"Weel, ye hae her in yer haun'. Whenever a wife that likes her man is puzzled wi' his conduct she aye thinks o' twa things—either there's anither wumman, or the man's ill. There's nae ither wumman, is there?"

"Ye needna ask me sic a question, Sam'l! Ye ken there's nane!"

"I meant nae hairm. Weel, yer wife'll pit that oot o' her min'—though she's sure tae think o't first, an' then she'll get terrible anxious an' wunner if ye're ill."

"But I've never been ill in ma life," protested the miller.

"A' the better! Every wife is feared, wi' a healthy man like you, that his first illness will be his last. Juist watch yer wife. Ye'll see her—aince ye've puzzled her by yer quateness—takin' an anxious keek at ye owre the tea-pot. Ye micht even catch her listenin' tae yer breathin' when she thinks ye're asleep. Weel!—play up tae that. Juist develop a wee hoast—or a sair back. Cairry yer haun' in yer back like Davie Miller. A haun' in the sma' o' the back aye suggests terrible pain tae a wumman."

The miller nodded his head.

"She'll be blate tae speir at ye," went on the smith, "for fear what she dreads may be true, but if ye play yer pairt weel, an' forbye, never feenish yer parritch in the mornin', she'll get that anxious she'll be able tae bide nae langer, an' she'll oot wi' it at last—maybe wi' a burst o' tears."

The smith paused, and scratched his chin with his thumb again. Then he wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. A heavy day's work was less exhausting than the weaving of this web. He swallowed twice.

"An' whit then?" asked the miller.

"Play up tae her. Tell her—which is nae lee—that every nicht ye ken' ye're a day nearer the grave. That's the gospel truth—but she'll be blin' wi' anxiety, an' she'll no' see through it. Pit an' airm roon' her, an' tell her she's been a guid wife tae ye. She believes that hersel' already; but she'll like tae ken ye ken; an' then juist whisper in her ear that ye'd like yer remainin' days tae be fu' o' peace an' quateness. By this time—if she's a wumman, ava'—she'll be greetin'." The smith paused again.

"But she'll be sendin' for the doctor!" protested the miller, "an' he'll see through me."

"Nae fear!" answered the smith. "She'll no' tak' that step withoot askin' ye—an' when she mentions it, juist tak' her by the haun' an' beg her no'. Tell her ye daurna face a certainty; ye'd like tae remain in doot aboot yer condection. That'll only make her mair anxious."

"Then she'll start physickin' me hersel', Sam'l?"

"That's bad, Andra! What wull she gi'e ye?"

"Senna tea, as like as no'."

"Weel, ye can water the geranium wi't. It's guid for floo'ers."

"But, Sam'l! ye dinna understaun'; she'll stand owre me till I drink it."

The smith pursed up his mouth. "Weel! ye'll hae tae tak' it, but ye can aye mak' oot

ye're a lot waur efter it and that'll mak' her mair anxious than ever. She'll be feared she's pushioned ye."

"But I'm no' gaun tae dee—an' I canna gang on pretendin' I'm ill a' the rest o' my days."

"There'll be nae need," said the smith. "When ye've got the wife properly anxious, an' in a mood no' tae resent ony firmness on your pairt, but tae regard it simply as the whim o' a seeck bairn or a deen' man, begin tae order her aboot. She'll rin tae dae yer biddin' blithely, wi' a pain in her heart instead o' a nippy answer on her tongue; an' mony a time she'll min' the flytin's she gi'ed ye, an' be sorry. An' ye've got tae keep it up. Ye've got tae be mair expectin', an' mair an' mair maisterfu' in a quate way, an' a' the time ye've got tae remind her that ye're drawin' nearer an' nearer yer en'."

"An' then, when she's got used tae feelin' yer haun's on the reins, when she's got used tae takin' orders frae ye withoot question, when her puir, seeck deen' man, that for love o' her an' the bairns is still cairryin' on at his job though every meenute brings him nearer the grave, has come tae be the chief care o' her life, the chief object in the house, an' no a mere speck o' stour tae be blawn aboot, ye can start tae get better."

"I see!" said the miller.

"Ye can either get better a' o' a sudden; or ye can tak' yer ain time tae come back frae the

brink o' the grave, but for Guid-sake dinna forget ye've got the reins in yer haun's at last, an' dinna let them go."

"Man, Sam'l!" said the miller; "ye're a genius. It's a fine plan, an' I'll try it. Lookin' back I can see the mistakes I've made. But I'll mak' a fresh start the day; an' I'll be maister in ma ain hoose."

"Like me?" said the smith.

"Aye! like you, Sam'l," answered the miller. "Gi'es yer haun'!"

When Mrs. Stott, who had come hot-foot, in a perspiration, from the mill, burst into the smiddy with a burning face and a red-hot tongue, she found Sam'l and Andra standing with hands clasped over the anvil.

She ignored the smith. She jerked her right arm towards her—her fist half clenched—and shouted:

"Andra Stott! What dae ye mean by neglectin' yer business like this? Harleyknowe has been waiting at the mill for the last half-oor. Hae ye nae sense i' yer heid—neglectin' yer best customer like that? Come oot o' this, I tell ye!"

The miller dropped the smith's hand and swallowed quickly, then he rubbed his hands together nervously:

"I'm comin', Jess!" he answered, in a thin, timorous voice.

"Weel!—haste ye!" she shouted, and, taking him by the coat sleeve, hurried him out of the smiddy, scolding him the while.

The smith watched them crossing the cobbles.

"Hopeless!" he muttered, and shook his head. "I wudna be Andrew Stott for a thousand' poun'. It's worth mair tae be maister in ane's ain hoose."

He picked up a cold-chisel and hammer and fell to work on the harrow, whistling complacently. A moment later his wife bounced into the smiddy.

"O' a' the thochtless, useless men in Dalbean, ye're the limit. Dae ye no ken yer denner has been waitin' for ye half an oor? Hoo dae ye think ony self-respectin' wumman can stand that? Come awa' intae the hoose. An' wash yer dirty face, ye're as black as a sweep."

The smith took off his apron meekly. "I'm comin', Aggie!" he answered.

VII

“MANY WATERS CANNOT QUENCH LOVE”

IN Dalbean we are not demonstrative in our domestic affection. A husband does not lavish upon the wife of his bosom those many terms of endearment which fall so easily from English lips. If he ventured to do it once, he would probably get such a flytin' from his better half for “bein' the waur o' drink, an' it no' a market day,” that he would probably never dare to do it again. Dalbean wives do not expect it, and Dalbean men shrink from expressing their devotion lest the enemy without the gates should misinterpret their tenderness of heart as incipient “saftness i' the heid.” But behind the somewhat austere veil which hides our real nature there are capacities for deep, strong, and enduring love. There is no froth on our national beverage, pour it out how you may—while beer!—but the comparison need be carried no further.

So little are our women-folk accustomed to wordy tenderness that Alison Bell, the wife of Geordie Bell of Tullyreoch, consulted the lawyer at Whinburn the first market-day after Geordie

had addressed her as "dear." The "writer," looking at her through his steel-rimmed spectacles as she sat in the client's chair, massive, perspiring, on the edge of tears, was puzzled.

"I am sure, Mrs. Bell," he said, "that the matter is capable of a very simple explanation, and you need have no anxiety."

Mrs. Bell struggled with a sob. Her breast heaved, and the "writer" thought how like she looked to a duck trying to swallow too large a bolus.

"I'd like tae think sae!" she answered. "But he's never dune it afore, at least no' sin' he brocht me hame fifteen year back. If it had been within a twalmonth o' the wedding I micht hae thocht naething o't; but efter fifteen year!"—and she finished the sentence with an explosive sob.

"When did it happen?" asked the writer sympathetically.

"I juist asked him a question at tea-time, an' he said 'Yes!—dear,' an' he hung on the word 'dear' sae lang that I'm sure he was thinkin' o' some ither woman. Men are awfu' deceivers, lawyer!"

The writer offered what sympathy he could, and undertook to see Geordie. He, perplexed, cast back in his mind to recall the occasion—and then laughed.

"I min' noo! Whan she spoke tae me I was in a broon-study, thinkin' o' the price o' seed—it's awfu' dear. I answered 'yes' tae her

question—an' the thocht that was in my min' aboot the seed cam' oot on the heels o't—'dear,' says I, meanin' the seed.' Geordie laughed again.

"I'm no' surprised she was upset, but I'll pit it richt wi' her."

As he came down the steps from the writer's office, Geordie pulled the string of his jug-purse tight. He was thinking :

"Thirteen-an'-fowrepence for saying 'dear' tae yer wife—it's a terrible extravagance. I micht hae bocht a lot o' seed wi't. I maun be mair carefu' wi' ma tongue!"

No, we do not parade our affection openly ; but, under the surface, the affection is real, and among us love may endure for twenty years without the exchange of a word. Whereby hangs a tale :

Soon after the Free Kirk minister, who proved unwittingly such a thorn in the flesh of Peter Strang, came among us he noticed a woman sitting Sabbath after Sabbath in a pew under the gallery. She always sat alone. He asked Davie Martin her name.

"That'll be Lizzie Sproat! She's a reg'lar attender, but she's no' a j'ined member."

"Where does she live?" asked the minister, "I must call on her."

"Ye'll fin' her in a wee cot on the Whinburn road, juist ayont the Barnslaps Brig."

The minister made a note in his little black book with the rubber band, and a few days

later called upon Lizzie. She welcomed him heartily.

"Come awa' ben!" she said "I'm rale proud tae see ye! An' hoo, think ye, wull ye like Dalbean?"

The minister expressed becoming approval of his new charge, and talked of many things. By and by he guided the conversation into the channel he sought.

"I have been pleased to notice the regularity with which you attend church; but I believe you are only an adherent, not a member. Would you not care to enter into the full fellowship of the Church?"

As soon as he had spoken the minister knew he had touched on tragedy.

The handsome face opposite him paled under its healthy brown; the dark blue eyes dropped; the woman's lips faltered, then steadied again; her right hand moved tremulously in her lap.

On the moor outside a peewit called.

"I've never daured tae come forrit, sir."

The minister spoke comforting words, knowing that to many a Scot the fear of "eating and drinking unworthily" is a real barrier to a public profession of faith.

"It's no' that, sir! an' I think ye for yer words—but twenty year sin', whan I was only a bit o' a lass, I had a misfortin.'"

O kindly word, that covers a tragedy in the life of many a country lass.

"But that need not keep you outside the

Church all your days. There is repentance, and forgiveness. Think of David—the man after God's own heart—he sinned; think of Mary Magdalene—first at the empty tomb."

Now the minister was young, and was quite unprepared for what followed. The woman who, a moment before, had been the picture of quiet penitence was on her feet before him. There was an angry light in her eyes.

"I hardly expecket that o' you, sir!" she cried. "Think o' mentionin' my bit misfortin' side by side wi' David's black sin. I was never half as bad as *him*."

The minister soothed her with some difficulty, and when she had sat down again said:

"I fear you have not yet the proper spirit of humble penitence."

"Oh aye!" she answered, "I've been penitent eneuch; an' mony a nicht I've grat masel' tae sleep; but I'm no' lettin' ony man—even a meenister—paint me as black as David."

"If the memory is not too painful," said the minister, "tell me about it."

"Weel, it's simple eneuch," she said. "My lad an' me were young; we lo'ed each ither dearly; we werena wyse—an' it juist happened!"

"But why did he not marry you?"

"Aye! there's the tribble. It was a' my mither. She was a proud wumman. She owned this wee biggin', an' she thocht she was somebody. She used tae speak o' hersel' as a

landed proprietor ; but she was only a cotman's wife. My lad was a cotman's son. She thocht he wasna guid eneuch for me ; an' when it happened an' he went like a man an' telt her (ma faither was deid, ye see) an' wanted tae mairry me at aince, she flew up at him, an' ordered him oot o' the hoose. She gi'ed him an' awfu' tongue-lashin', an', waur than that, she went an' made mischief an' bad bluid wi' his faither, an', tae mak' a lang story short, there was sic bad feelin' betwixt the auld folk, an' sic bad names flung aboot between them, an' a'thegither sic a steer, that ma lad got scunnered an' ran awa'."

She hesitated a moment, for her voice had been trembling. Then she added quietly—"The bairn was born ere he cam' back."

"But did he offer you marriage then?" asked the minister.

"Na!—he's never spoken tae me frae that day tae this."

There was surprise in the minister's voice. "That is very extraordinary. Is he still living?"

"Oh, aye! an' he's no' mairrit either. He leeves less than a quarter o' a mile frae here."

The minister passed a puzzled hand over a still more puzzled face.

"But did he never do anything for the support of the child?"

"No. I was owre proud to ask him. I needed nae help."

“ And did he take no interest in his child ? ”

“ Oh aye ! When wee Alec was auld eneeuch tae gang tae the schule he used often tae tell me that a man (an’ I kent it was his faither) would stop him on the road, an’ tak’ him intae his cottage an’ set him on his knee, an’ sing a song tae him, an’ whiles gi’e him a sweetie.”

Then he is human after all, thought the minister, who sat in thought for a moment, and then asked suddenly :

“ Where is your boy now ? ”

“ He went tae Canada twa years sin’. He’s gettin’ on fine. I hear frae him nearly every week.”

The minister crossed and uncrossed his knees and again passed his hand over his face. He looked round the bright kitchen, saw the vivid white whorls on the flags, noted the red-and-black rug on the hearth-stone, the brightness of the steel fender, the polished black grate, the shining brasses on the mantelpiece, the gaudy china on the dresser. Surely a woman like this, house-proud, clean, capable, and spirited, could make a man happy. It was bold to the point of rashness—but he would try. At last, hesitatingly, he spoke what was in his mind.

“ Do you still love the father of your child ? ” he asked.

For a moment the woman bowed her head, and studied the clean apron spread over her knees. Then she looked up and spoke :

“ I’ve nocht again’ him,” she said gently.

The words were colourless enough, but as the minister looked at her it seemed to him that a little light had been kindled in the depths of her eyes, and on her face there was a wistful tenderness that he had seen before on a woman's face—the face of the girl who was soon to be his wife. He was seeing, as in a glass darkly, the soul of a woman; he was catching a faint whisper of some message throbbing in her heart that she could not bring herself to utter to a stranger.

He spoke softly: "Your life and that of your old lover were once linked very tenderly. The chain has been broken, but it may still be repaired. You live lonely here; your lover, you tell me, lives close at hand, and you are both free. Others came between you, and parted you long years ago. May I try to help you, may I try to bring you together again? The boy should be a golden link between you."

For a moment the woman buried her face in her hands, but she raised it again quickly. There were tears on her lids.

"It's my pride an' his blateness that hae kept us apairt. Ye may see whit ye can dae, sir; but tak' care no' tae let him think I want him, if he doesna want me; I couldna thole that." She spoke proudly.

"But, if he wants you, you are ready to marry him?"

"Aye, I'll tak' him. It needs mair than I've come through tae kill love in a wumman's hert."

"And his name? You have not told me that."

"They ca' him Sandy Gibson. He leeves in the second cottage frae here on the road tae Dalbean. Ye'll ken it because there's a rowan-tree in the hedge by the gate, an' the curtain in the room-winda has a hole in't that wants darnin'."

The minister laughed—the anxious moment was over.

"So," he said, "you have been taking notice of his domestic needs. That's a good sign."

"Weel, what for should I no'? The puir man needs a wife tae look efter him, if he'd only the sense tae ken it."

As he walked home to the manse the minister began to wonder if he had been quixotic. There is nothing a young Scotsman dreads so much—and he a minister—as to make himself a laughing-stock; and more than once a shiver, that was not due to the evening air, fluttered along his spine. That Lizzie still loved Sandy was obvious enough, even to the eyes of a man. But what of Sandy? Two well-worn sayings jostled each other in his mind—"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread"; and, "Man's love is of his life a thing apart." He must walk warily! Being a wise man, he took counsel of a woman—the woman he himself loved. He wrote to her the full story of his doings. She answered with a woman's wisdom:

"I laugh when I think of you, my old sober-

sides, as a match-maker. Which of your professors instructed you in the delicate art? Was it old 'Dry-as-dust' who lectured you on Pastoral Theology, or does it come under Homiletics, or did you learn it from a woman? Confess, O base deceiver!

"Lizzie interests me. She has some fine qualities. I wonder if Sandy is worthy of her? I am sure I could handle him better than you can; though doubtless Lizzie would have rolled herself up like a hedgehog, with all her spines bristling, if I had tried to approach her. Be careful, my boy! but go on with the good work, and may all good angels guide you. Whatever you do, don't split the Kirk! I do not fancy myself as wife of the minister of 'a remnant.' And don't sit up all night learning your sermons by heart to satisfy Peter Strang. I want to marry a man—not a saintly shadow."

Thus encouraged, the minister took upon himself to see Sandy. It was difficult to broach the matter he had in mind, but at last he succeeded in unburdening himself. For a long time Sandy sat silent, his outspread hands moving nervously over his knees. His eyes seemed to be studying the muddy toes of his boots. At last he looked up.

"She didna ask ye tae come, did she?" he asked.

"No," answered the minister, "I offered to come. I had to persuade her to let me."

"An' ye think she likes me yet?"

"Why, man, she *loves* you!" The minister spoke with conviction.

"Umphm!" said Sandy. "I've a kin' o' likin' for Lizzie masel'. She's no' a bad sort o' lass' ava.'"

"Sandy!" shouted the minister, as he smote him heavily on the shoulder, "you're not fit to tie her shoes. She's a woman any man might be proud to call his wife and, you know, you owe her your name: she's the mother of your boy."

Sandy bit nervously at his thumb-nail.

"Ye're richt, sir! I wranged her sairly. I'm terrible ashamed. Dae ye think she's forgi'en me?"

"Long ago!—Man, I tell you she loves you still."

"It's no' a lee ye're tellin' me, sir?"

"Sandy!" exclaimed the minister indignantly.

"Forgi'e me, sir! I meant nae hairm; but I thoct she maun hate me."

"'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it,'" said the minister softly.

"It looks like it," said Sandy, as he rose, and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, paced up and down the kitchen floor.

"Ye're shure she likes me, sir?"

"Sandy! I have told you."

"An' she's no' likely tae flee up at me, if I gang to see her?"

“Sandy!” said the minister firmly, “you need to be told the truth. You’re a miserable coward. You betrayed Lizzie! you ran away from her; when you came back you never offered her marriage. You’ve done nothing for your child. You’ve not spoken to her for a score of years, and now you’re frightened to go near her lest she gives you the rough edge of her tongue. You’re not a man, Sandy! you’re a worm!”

The minister never guessed in later years when Sandy became one of his most loyal champions that it was this straight and swift reproach that made the man love him.

Sandy stood stock still in the middle of the floor. There was no sound heard save the whirr of a fly on the window-pane. The minister looked at the man reproachfully. Had he any soul? At last Sandy spoke.

“Ye’re wrang, sir. I’m no’ a worm—I’m a swine!”

“I didn’t call you that!” said the minister, “but I’m glad you see how badly you have behaved.”

Sandy took three quick steps and snatched his cap from the nail on the back of the door.

“It’s puir mainners, sir, tae turn ye oot like this; but ye’ll forgi’e me, I ken. I’ve kept a guid wumman waitin’ for twenty year. I daurna keep her a meenite langer.”

He threw open the door, and held it for the

minister to pass through. By the rowan-tree near the gate he seized the minister's hand.

"If she'll only tak' me, sir, I'll never forget ye."

The minister stood outside the gate, gently rubbing the hand which Sandy had held. It felt as though a bone or two were broken. Sandy had taken to the road, and was already walking quickly. The minister let his eyes wander over the cottage and noted with amusement the hole in the curtain that Lizzie had spoken of. Ere he turned to walk back to Dalbean he looked at Sandy again. He had broken into a trot. When he passed Peter Strang's shop the minister was whistling. Peter heard and, glowering through his window, added this unseemly levity to the rapidly growing catalogue of the minister's sins.

So it came to pass that two months later there was a wedding in the parlour of the Free Kirk Manse. Lizzie took her man home with her to her own cottage. It was her property, and in far better repair than the cottage where Sandy had lived. Cynics like Willie Shed laughed, and prophesied trouble. But they were wrong. There was no happier couple in Dalbean than Lizzie and her man. To sit with them by the spotless fireside was to share in an idyll of domestic happiness. Lizzie doted on Sandy, but she did not spoil him. She would not let him smoke in the kitchen, nor in that holy of holies known as "ben the hoose." He had to take his evening pipe in the recess between the inner

and the outer door—with the outer door half open. And she made him “tak’ off his dirty feet” before walking across the virginal whiteness of her “whorley” floor when he came in from his work. His carpet slippers waited for him behind the outer door. And she dressed him well. His Sunday collar was the whitest in Dalbean; his “Sunday best” was always spotless; and twice each Sabbath she took him to the kirk. This worried Sandy a little at first—for he had ceased many years before to attend church at all, and he found it irksome to sit through two long services in one day. But he felt that by “gi’en the minister a hearin’” he was in some way repaying him for what he had done in devising his present happiness.

Dalbean looked on in wonder. Sam’l Delap summed up the general opinion. “I wadna hae thocht it possible. They’re as chief as twa young anes; an’ Lizzie has made a man o’ him. I never thocht muckle o’ him afore.”

Sandy was happy: but there was one fly in the ointment of his domestic bliss. Every fourth Saturday afternoon Lizzie made him sit in a chair in the garden with a sheet round his neck, and a bowl on his head, and she clipped his hair. She let him smoke during the ordeal, and more than one passer-by laughed quietly, as they saw her straighten her back and with half-opened scissors wave away the cloud of tobacco-reek that the wind was blowing in her eyes.

But Sandy worshipped Lizzie in spite of her tonsorial tyranny, and her iron rule. Lonely so long, and a somewhat feckless bachelor, he had grown accustomed to slovenly ways. It was a joy to live in a house where everything was kept clean without effort on his part; where comfort went hand in hand with reasonable plenty; and where there was always the bright face of a woman, and the pleasantness of her voice.

Many a time the minister and his pretty wife dropped in of an evening for a chat with Lizzie and Sandy; and in the darkness, on the way home, the lady of the manse would press her own man's arm tenderly and whisper:

"There are two very happy homes in Dalbean—theirs and ours; and you, old sober-sides, have helped to make both."

Five years after his father and mother were married Alec came back from Canada to see them. It was a great day in their lives. Lizzie had spent an arduous week cleaning the house from top to bottom. Sandy had spent what leisure he had in digging the garden, and painting the doors and the window-frames. On the great day they were both waiting in their Sunday best in the kitchen—one or other of them had been looking up the road every five minutes the whole afternoon; but they missed him, so that, when he knocked at the door, they were both in their chairs by the fire.

Lizzie rushed out, and in a moment was in the

arms of a handsome, stalwart man who greeted her with the words—"It's me, mither!"

Sandy hung back a little self-consciously. Some old shame stirred within him; but the young man broke the tense moment with a cheery "Weel, faither!—it's fine tae be back," and held out a hearty hand.

They sat down to a "high tea"—happy, united; and when Lizzie nodded to Sandy to ask a blessing he raised his hands over the table and said fervently—"For these an' a' Thy blessin's we thank Thee kindly, Lord." As she took the cosy from the teapot, Lizzie looked understandingly at her man, and from Sandy to Alec—and in her heart she said—"His faither's ain boy."

When the tea, long-drawn out, and the wonderful talk were over, Alec asked his mother's leave to go down to Dalbean. There were so many of his old friends to see—and he would be back by bed-time. With ready lips, but with a little grudge in her heart, Lizzie let him go.

His father went down the road with him for a short distance, and when he came back Lizzie had tidied up the kitchen.

"He's a fine lad!" said Sandy. "See what he's gien me!"—and he exhibited a briar pipe and a flat cake of tobacco. "He tells me, Lizzie, he's got a graun' present for ye in his kist, whan it comes wi' the cairrier the morn."

"He's a guid boy!" said Lizzie, pride in her voice, but a tear in her eye.

Sandy began to pare shavings from the cake of tobacco, and packed them lightly in his pipe. "I'll juist gang ootside the door, Lizzie, an' try the pipe."

Lizzie stopped him.

"This isna every nicht, Sandy—ye can smoke by the fire."

Sandy sat down with his feet on the fender and lit his briar. He puffed appreciatively. "This is better than Bogie roll," he said.

Lizzie was knitting quickly—her steel needles clicking sharply.

"Hoo auld is Alec?" asked Sandy suddenly.

"He'll be twenty-six on the twenty-third o' Mairch."

"Hoo the time flies, Lizzie!"

Lizzie nodded her head.

Sandy puffed luxuriously.

"Dae ye min' the summer afore he was born, Lizzie. The nichts in June—up in the wood; wi' the scent o' the hawthorn; an' the chirpin' o' the wee birds as they cuddled doon tae sleep, an' the——"

Lizzie dropped her knitting in her lap. She leaned forward suddenly, and laid her hand on Sandy's knee.

"Dinna, Sandy, dinna! Ye'll mak' me greet."

Sandy patted her hand gently. Being slow of wit he hardly understood.

"He's a fine lad, Lizzie; we may weel be prood o' him."

Lizzie nodded her head. Then after a moment

she withdrew her hand from Sandy's knee and took up her knitting again. Suddenly she began to sing, not loudly, but crooningly, as one would hush a child to sleep. Her voice was sweet, and full of tenderness :

“ John Anderson, my jo John,
 When we were first acquent,
 Your locks were like the raven,
 Your bonnie brow was brent.
 But now your brow is bald, John,
 Your locks are like the snow :
 But blessings on your frosty pow,
 John Anderson, my jo.

“ John Anderson, my jo John,
 We clamb the hill thegither,
 And mony a canty day, John,
 We've had wi' ane anither :
 Now we maun totter doon, John,
 But hand in hand we'll go :
 And sleep thegither at the foot,
 John Anderson, my jo.”

VIII

MAISIE'S TOKEN

I

ONE morning in June the Free Kirk minister's wife was out in the garden. The hour was early, and the roses, not yet fully open, were jewelled with dew. She went from bush to bush like a bee questing, and by and by came to the hedge where a trailing spray of wild roses flaunted their virginal pink and white, unabashed by their nearness to their better-born, though not more beautiful, kinsfolk within the garden.

As she stooped to admire them she heard a cough that ended in a sob, and looking over the hedge she saw a girl sitting by the roadside. Her elbows were on her knees; her face was hidden; and her shoulders quivered as though she were fighting with grief. The girl's hat lay at her feet, and the sun, striking her wavy hair, made it glisten like spun gold. The minister's wife watched for a moment in silence. No girl in Dalbean had hair so beautiful as that, she thought; but her hair alone did not suffice to tell her who the girl might be. Even without the quivering shoulders and the hidden face the minister's wife, who was sensitive to the sorrows

of others, would have known that the girl was in trouble; so with womanly solicitude she bent over the hedge and called softly:

"What is the matter? Can I help you?"

Startled, the girl raised her head quickly, and brushed her tears away, and in that moment the minister's wife knew her.

"Maisie!" she said tenderly "you've come back! I am so glad."

They were the first words spoken to the wanderer who had halted thus disconsolately and timorously on the confines of her native village. They were words of welcome, and they came from the minister's wife, who, beyond all women, in virtue of her position, might have been stern in judgment. So, at least, thought Maisie, who buried her bonnie face in her hands again and sobbed bitterly.

In a moment the elder woman was by her side raising her gently to her feet, and whispering those kindly words of comfort that none but a good woman can find it in her heart to say to an erring sister.

"Maisie," she whispered, "don't cry. Come to the manse, and tell me all your troubles." And then, with a woman's sure instinct, she added, "I'm all alone. The minister's away."

"My heart failed me. I was gangin' hame, but," and the girl's weary voice trembled, "I could gang nae further."

The minister's wife took her arm and led her

up the gravelled walk through the rose garden.

"I know!" she said. "I understand. Poor Maisie!"

"Is my faither leevin' yet?" asked the girl.

"Oh yes! He's living and very well: I saw him yesterday—and your mother."

"Thank God!" whispered Maisie brokenly.

"I ken he'll forgi'e me, but mither"—and she sobbed.

The minister's wife guided the shrinking girl into the manse, and took her to her own room. Then with her own hands she brought hot water and said with brisk purposefulness:

"When you have washed and had something to eat, you'll feel better, Maisie. You'll find me in the dining-room, just across the passage. Come when you're ready." And turning to the dressing-table she added, being a woman of understanding, "There's a box of hairpins here by the looking-glass."

Then she hurried to the kitchen, and bade the maid prepare a second breakfast.

In the dining-room she sank into an easy chair beside the hearth, and fell to thinking. The prodigal son may, on occasion, as the Book tells, be welcomed home by a father eager, running, with arms out-stretched, and a heart full of forgiveness; but the lot of the prodigal daughter who comes back is most often harder. And she thought of Maisie's father, John Cargill, dour, upright, unbending, and of Jess his wife, sour

of temper, shrewish of tongue. "Poor little Maisie!" she said in her heart; and she breathed a silent prayer for guidance.

Maisie came into the room timidly, and the lady of the manse rose from her chair.

"Breakfast will be ready in a moment," she said. "Come and sit down," and she drew up another easy-chair, and when her guest had taken it, slipped a cushion behind her head.

"Ye're awfu' kind," she said gratefully, and her shoulders quivered as though she were about to fall to tears again.

The minister's wife spoke briskly. "Not a bit of it," she said, "I'm glad to be the first to welcome you back to Dalbean; but you'll make me cross if you cry any more. You know no woman looks her best when she's crying; so please don't." And she laughed.

A tremulous little smile played on Maisie's face, and the minister's wife thought how beautiful she looked. The morning sun was playing on one side of her head; her golden hair shone in the light. The elder woman studied her: noted the shapely ears, like pink rosebuds peeping from among her hair; saw the delicately curved, regular eyebrows, the long lashes, the clear white of her large eyes, the rich brown of the irises; the skin so fair and delicate that one could see into its depths as into fine porcelain; the straight, clean-cut nose; the mouth with pale lips moulded in a bow; the dainty chin; the long, white, graceful neck,

with little shadows dancing upon it ; the pose of the figure as the girl sat gracefully ; the white hands in her lap, the blue veins showing through the skin ; and the long, tapering fingers. Maisie was a beautiful flower : more beautiful, thought the minister's wife, than any girl she had ever seen before ; more beautiful than she remembered her to have been before she left home. And she thought of her father and mother again, and was puzzled ; and of Maisie's two sisters, now married—comely enough, but by no means beautiful ; and she wondered. Then a little rebel thought stirred in her mind : for even the wife of a Free Kirk minister may dare to challenge the wisdom of God, if she does not tell her husband. Was it fair, she thought, that this child of a humble home should have been burdened with the handicap of such extraordinary beauty ? Her beauty had been her undoing.

The coming of the maid with a laden tray broke in upon her thoughts, and she took her place at the table, Maisie at her right hand. The girl was feeling more at her ease ; her emotions were under control ; the warm food and the kindly atmosphere were restoring her body and soul. And, being a tactful woman, the minister's wife chatted briskly, giving her all the news, salted with a little gossip of Dalbean. It was not until the meal was over that she would let Maisie talk. Then, when she had her safely back in her easy-chair, and the maid had cleared

the table, she leaned forward suddenly and said :

" And now, I think, I've told you all there is to tell. You know, the minister sometimes says he'll bind me in book-covers, and label me ' The Chronicles of Dalbean,' and keep me on his study table for reference ; but I tell him that if he makes a book of me there will be no one to darn his socks—so he hasn't done it yet : "—and she smiled.

The girl smiled too and asked—" How is Mr. Weir ? "

" Oh ! " said his proud wife, " he's very well. He's in Edinburgh at present ; but he's coming back to-morrow, and no doubt he'll come home with his bag full of books, leaving his brushes, and his collars, and half his linen behind him in the hotel. He's like that, you know."

That anyone, even his wife, dared poke fun at a minister gave Maisie a little shock. Woman-like, she spoke in his defence.

" But he's a good man ! " She began her speech in English, she ended it in the language of her childhood—" They're no' a' guid," she said.

" Oh yes ! he's a good man : the best in the world. I know it, though Peter Strang doesn't. But they're not all good, as you say."

The lady of the manse knew she was on the brink of confidences, and waited quietly. Maisie moved restlessly in her chair, then clasped her hands and looked at the tinsel in the grate. Then

speaking quietly, sometimes in the homely speech of her own folk, sometimes in the more cultured tongue of that great city which had been the scene of her tragedy, she told her story.

"I dinna ken hoo muckle ye hae heard, Mrs. Weir," she said, "but ye've been awfu' kind tae me, an' I'll tell ye a' aboot it."

The minister's wife, afraid that a word might turn the unhappy girl from her purpose, said nothing, but waited.

"Ye'll min' hoo Mrs. Arbuthnot's frien', Lady Temple, took a fancy tae me when she saw me ane day in the street, an' cam' an' asked mither if she'd let me enter her service in London. Mither was a' against it, an' said it was owre far frae hame; but I was a' for't, an' faither had nocht tae say; so I persuaded mither an' she let me gang. That's fowre year sin', an' I was only nineteen then."

The minister's wife remembered, and recalled the bonnie, innocent Maisie, once a child in her own Sabbath-school class; but she did not speak; and the girl continued:

"Weel, I went; an' it was a graun' hoose in London, fu' o' servants,—there was ten o' us a' thegither, an' I was happy as could be. Her leddyship was awfu' guid tae me, an' mony a time if she met me on the stair she would speak tae me an' ask me if I liked the place, an' sometimes she gi'ed me wee bits o' news she had aboot Dalbean frae the Castle, an' I never felt far frae hame then. An' the ither servants were

very kind, though they used tae laugh a wee at my queer manner o' speakin' at first; an' they would try tae mimic me, an' ca' me 'wee Scottie.' An' I thocht it was them that were speakin' funny; no' me! But I was awfu' happy, an' daein' rale weel; an' I was able tae send mither hame some o' my wages. An' it was the prood lass I was when her leddyship sent for me ae day tae her room, an' the house-keeper was there wi' her. An' her leddyship said: 'Cargill, Mrs. Joicey gives me a very good report of you, and I am very pleased with what I have seen of you myself. As the upper housemaid is leaving there will be a vacancy for an under housemaid, so I propose to give you the post.' So I thenked her, and cam' awa' doon tae the servants'-ha', my cheeks burnin' wi' pride, an' I sat doon an' wrote tae mither. An' whan the news cam' oot aboot my promotion everybody in the servants'-ha' was that nice: an' Mr. Jones, the butler, chaffed me afore them a' an' said, 'Well done, wee Scottie! She'll be cock o' the walk here in three years' time. The Scot always comes to the top of the tree in London!' An' they all laughed; an' though it was only his fun I was awfu' prood that I was Scots."

As she talked Maisie had shed her listlessness and as she remembered her happy days her sad eyes had lighted up. But she paused suddenly now, and waited long ere she went on:

"An' the very next day I met him." She

paused again, and the minister's wife, being wise, did not interrupt her, but waited.

"It happened sae simply," she said. "It was my half-day, an' I was crossin' Oxford Street, no' thinking o' what I was daein', but wi' my mind on my guid fortune, when I suddenly heard the folk cry at me. I cam' oot o' my day-dream wi' a start, an' there I was, richt below the noses o' the horses in a bus. I thocht I was gaun to be killed, but before I could move somebody's airm was roon' me, an' I was thrown oot o' haim's way, but the man that had saved me was under the horses' feet. There was an awfu' steer: but the young man wasna hurt, but picked hissel' up an' came on tae the foot-path. A policeman cam' an' took doon some notes, an' by an' by the crowd cleared away, an' there was naebody left o't but the young man an' me. So I thenked him for savin' me; an' he spoke that nice, an' said it was naething, an' that he'd be glad to do the same again for me any day of the week, an' he laughed an' was sae frien'ly. An' then he said, anxious like: 'You must be badly shaken. I fear I was very rough; let me see you home.' An' though I feared it wasna richt, he being a gentleman an' me only a servant-lass, I let him tak' me a bit o' the road. An' whan we pairted naething would satisfy him but he maun see me again. So I promised, an' met him on my next half-day—an' so it went on. I never said a word tae onybody in the hoose. It was my secret: I nursed it in

ma hert an' was prood o't; an' sune I began tae love him. Leonard—that was his name—let on that he loved me. He would say the bonniest bits o' poetry aboot my e'en, an' my face, an' my hair, an' was aye sae tender an' gentle wi' me, an' ca'ed me the loveliest names, an' said I was the prettiest girl in London. An' I, in my pride, drank it a' in, for I loved him.

“Weel, by an' by, her leddyship went tae the south o' France an' as there wasna sae muckle tae dae in the hoose the housekeeper gave us mair time tae oorsels. An' whan she said tae me: ‘Cargill, I hope you have friends in town with whom you can spend your time, for I cannot have you wandering about the streets,’ I telt her a lee. I said I had an aunt in Hampstead, an' she bothered nae mair. An' a' the time I was seeing the man I loved; an' I was a happy, happy lass till he promised tae mairry me an' I fell.”

Maisie stopped suddenly, and looked anxiously at the minister's wife.

“Mrs. Weir,” she said, “it was because I loved him; it was no' because I was bad at hert.”

The minister's wife nodded her head understandingly: “Yes, Maisie,” she said; and Maisie took courage again.

“I saw him but aince efter that,” she said slowly, “for he telt me he had tae gang awa' for a week on business. But he never cam' back tae me, an' whan I knew my baby was comin’

an' went tae the address he had gi'en me I found naebody had ever heard o' him there."

The golden head bent down quickly; two long thin hands covered her beautiful face, and Maisie wept.

Mrs. Weir rose and went over beside her, and gently stroked the girl's bowed head. It was long ere she raised it again.

"An' then I knew I couldna keep my secret much langer; so I wrote tae mither, an' telt her the hale story an' asked her tae forgi'e me. An' she wrote me back an awfu' letter, tellin' me I had disgraced her an' never tae darken her door again; an' that I was nae dochter o' hers ony mair an' sayin' that faither agreed wi' a' she said. But I kent he didna, for inside her letter was a wee scrap o' paper poked in at the corner efter the letter was sealed an' on it was written in faither's haun', 'My hoose is aye yer hame.' I dinna think mither can hae telt him what she wrote tae me." Maisie sobbed for a moment, but she quickly mastered herself and went on:

"I was mad wi' grief an' fear. I didna ken what tae dae, for I had naebody tae confide in; but I saw I couldna bide muckle langer in my place. So I telt anither lee tae the housekeeper. I said my aunt at Hampstead was ill and wanted me tae look efter her, so she gi'ed me ten days' leave an' I took ma box and never went back. London's a big place, Mrs. Weir, and a lass can easy hide there. I had saved a few poun's, but I still had tae work if I wadna starve, an' I got

a job in a wee hotel in a back street, where they asked for nae references.

"But by an' by I had tae leave there tae, an' then I took ill an' my baby was born in hospital. He was the bonniest, sweetest wee boy in the hale world, an' he was my very ain. When I cuddled him up in my airms an' felt his wee warm face against my breist it was mair than requital for a' I'd suffered. But I had tae wean him young; for I had tae work tae keep him; an' I used tae leeve him wi' the woman I lodged wi' and gang oot tae work by the day. An' he wad laugh an' gurgle tae me whan I cam' back at nicht; an' a' my weariness fell off me. An' then juist when he was comin' on fine and was nine months auld he sickened suddenly an' in a day he was deid. Mrs. Weir!"—and there was anguish in Maisie's voice and anguish in her lovely eyes—"ye dinna think God will be hard on my wee bairn because o' what I had dune?"

There were tears in the eyes of the minister's wife. She stole over to the girl's chair, and putting an arm round her, whispered:

"Maisie! You poor child! God is not like that. God is Love."

Maisie sighed with relief, her dreadful fear melting before this assurance; but she wept on the shoulders of the warm-hearted woman who was comforting her ere she went on.

"So I kissed his bonnie wee face for the last time an' we laid him in a big kirk-yard where there were thoosan's an' thoosan's o' heidstanes

but nae kirk, an' it broke my hert tae leave him there. For I thocht that wi' sae mony thoosan's lying yonder a wee baby wad be lost sight o', an I never rested till I had saved enough tae pit a wee flat stane on his grave wi' the words :

“ ‘ MAISIE'S BAIRN.’ ”

For I wanted tae mak' shure that if God ever wished tae gi'e him back tae me He'd ken.”

The tears were welling up into Mrs. Weir's eyes. She was thinking of her own little grave in the tiny kirkyard of Dalbean; she was one with Maisie in her sorrow, all social barriers swept down by a common grief.

“ An' on the Sabbath day,” said Maisie brokenly, “ I used tae gang up tae the kirkyard an' sit doon beside the wee lad, for I thocht he'd be lonely amang sae many strangers. An' I'd talk tae him an' I'd sing quately, so as no tae wake him, as I'd done mony a time before when he was sleepin' wi' his wee heid on my breist—‘ The Lord's my Shepherd.’ ”

The minister's wife could stand no more. “ Maisie! dear,” she cried “ stop! stop!—I can bear no more—my heart is too full.”

Mrs. Weir rose and went to the window, where she stood for a moment looking out on the garden. She dried her eyes gently, and when she felt mistress of herself again came back to her chair. Maisie was sitting still, a far-off look in her eyes. her pale hands folded in her lap. She looked up suddenly. “ I'm sorry,” she said

simply. "I didna think my sorrow would mak' onybody greet but me. But I'll hurt ye nae mair."

"Tell me the rest," said the minister's wife gently. "I can bear it now."

"Well there's no muckle mair tae tell. I worked till I fell ill an' then they took me tae the hospital. I was awfu' bad a long long time, an' mony a nicht I thought that I was deein'; an' I was glad. But they wouldna let me dee. They did a' they could tae mak' me strong again—an' they were awfu' kind—mair particularly the big Scots doctor, Sir Andrew. He used tae pat me on the heid an' say, 'And how is my little country-woman to-day?'—an' I was awfu' prood that he owned me as a country-woman o' his ain afore a' yon students an' nurses. But he was like that. An' ae Sabbath mornin' whan there were nae students aboot an' the house-doctor wasna' there—only Sir Andrew an' the Sister an' me—he sat doon by the bedside whan he had examined me and began tae talk. An' he talked tae me in braid Scots, so that it made me greet; an' then he patted my heid an' said—'Lassie! ye maun gang hame. London's nae place for you. Get awa' back tae yer ain hills o' heather an' yer ain moorland air. They'll dae mair for ye than I can.'

"An' whan they dischaired me a few days later the Sister gave me an envelope—'It's from Sir Andrew,' she said. An' whan I opened it

there were three golden sovereigns in it an' this written in his ain haun'—'Lassie: gang hame.'

"So here I am," ended Maisie. "I've walked frae Whinburn this morning, an' I'm feared tae gang ony further; I'm feared they'll turn me awa'."

The long and tragic story was ended. It had cost the fragile girl much to tell it, but the sympathy of the warm-hearted woman who had listened had given her strength.

There was a long pause, then the minister's wife said gently, "Maisie! I am not scolding you, for if you have sinned you have suffered bitterly, and I would not make your burden heavier; but why did you never write to your father and mother? I know something of the pain you have given them: your shame and your silence have almost broken their hearts."

Maisie hung her head.

"I wrote mony a letter," she said, "but I aye tore them up; I was owre ashamed tae send them. I can see I've behaved cruelly tae them besides disgracing their guid name; but I thocht they wadna want tae own me ony mair."

Mrs. Weir looked at the stricken girl, and understood. "Poor little frightened creature," she thought. She rose from her chair. "Maisie," she said, "I am going to see your mother and father to tell them you have come home. That will make it easier for you all. Wait here till I come back."

The girl fell to sobbing again. "I dinna deserve sic kindness," she said.

"Well! never mind about that. Lie down on the sofa and rest—for I'm sure you're very tired; I'll be back in a little while."

As she went down the brae from the manse, and drew near the village, she was deep in thought. She knew that John Cargill and Jess had given up Maisie as dead. Even an erring daughter may be thought of with love if it is certain she will never come back. But her unexpected reappearance may dispel the atmosphere of pitying forgiveness with which memory has surrounded her. Would their affection withstand the strain of her return? So it was with a somewhat anxious heart that the minister's wife knocked on John Cargill's door. What transpired behind it she never told, even to her husband. She fought a hard battle and she won. Maisie might come home! but she must come after dark. That was her mother's stipulation, and in it the minister's wife read the uncertain measure of her forgiveness.

II

So Maisie came home. There was no fatted calf killed for her nor any best robe brought forth for her adornment. She did not expect them; but the hand of her father laid tenderly and shyly, with no word spoken, on her head

as she sat by the fireside the day after her return was more to her than these. Her mother had received her without upbraiding—she had promised so much to the minister's wife—but without any demonstration of affection. But her coldness melted into motherly anxiety when Maisie, within a week of her home-coming, took ill. The old trouble in heart and lungs which had brought her under the care of Sir Andrew in the hospital in London declared itself again. It was his knowledge that this was inevitable and that the issue was already determined which had led that kindly physician to urge the girl to return home.

It was more than a month ere she was able to leave her bed, and during that time her mother recognised that her daughter had come home to die. Sore stricken, she crushed her last bitter thought from her heart and became all tenderness. The minister's wife saw the change and was glad. Maisie felt it, and was happy ; and one evening in the twilight, when her strength was returning, she told her mother in broken accents about the lonely little grave in the great cemetery in London. The dour lines in the old woman's face softened and her eyes filled, and she opened a long-closed gate in her heart and took her daughter and the bairn of her sin and sorrow—Maisie's bairn—into its inner chambers. But she made no open avowal, for that was not her way.

Maisie's illness had two results. It softened

her mother, and it let the village learn gradually that John Cargill's lost daughter had returned.

"What's wrang at Cargill's?" asked this one or that. "I saw the doctor's gig at the door."

"Hae ye no' heard?" came the answer "Maisie—ye min' her—the guid-lookin' dochter that went wrang has come hame."

"Is that so? Ye're no tellin' me!"

"Aye! an' I hear she's fell bad."

"Dear me! What like's the maitter?"

"I'm feared it's a decline."

"Ah! Then she's no lang for this world," and the speakers would shake their heads solemnly.

The men, knowing that some other creature of their own sex had had a part in the girl's undoing, said in their hearts, "Puir lassie!"—while the women, aware that some of the sorrows of their sex can find assuagement only in death, whispered—"It's maybe juist as weel."

The way of transgressors is hard, and some there be who make it harder. Maisie was a sensitive child by nature, and her sorrows and her sickness had served to make her more sensitive still. She shrank from being seen; but when she was able to be about again the doctor insisted upon fresh air and sunlight. It was a hint given him by Sir Andrew, to whom he had written. That kindly soul had replied:

"I'm glad to hear that bonnie lass has taken

my advice and gone home. She interested me greatly, for I guessed something of her story. I am afraid little can be done for her, but fresh air and sunshine may prolong her days. See that she gets all she can, and if you think I can help you with any suggestion please do not hesitate to write to me again. You might try——”

And there followed some hints that are of no interest to those who read.

So when she was able to leave her room the doctor instructed her mother to let her sit out-of-doors, well wrapped up, in the sunlight. Jess shook her head, thinking that the doctor had parted with his senses.

“But she’s got an awfu’ hoast, doctor. The fresh air will kill her.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” said the doctor testily. “Do as I bid you.”

So in the morning, because the sun was brighter there, Maisie sat in a chair on the cobbles by the street-door with its black door-posts, where the whitewashed front of the house flung back the rays of the sun and lent them an increased brightness. In the afternoon, when the sun had crossed the roof of the cottage, she sat in the quiet and sheltered garden.

She shrank from the publicity of the street; for though some of the folks were kind, and came and spoke heartening words to her, others were cruel, partly through thoughtlessness, partly because it was in them to be cruel. But

sometimes the cruelty recoiled on their own heads.

One morning her mother had helped her out, and left her in the big wooden chair, with a shepherd's plaid wrapped carefully round her, held at the neck by a great cairn-gorm brooch. She had not sat long ere she saw a familiar figure come striding along the road. The smith was an old friend of hers. Many a happy hour she had spent in the smiddy as a child. He had not seen her since her home-coming. She knew he would be kind to her, and she waited his coming. And then she felt that a pitiless eye was upon her. She turned slightly, and saw Mrs. Brown standing three doors away outside Peter Strang's shop. There was scorn and contempt in her cold stare, as with head thrust forward she glowered at the girl. Maisie shrank: she felt outcast; and she turned her head away quickly to escape the condemning scrutiny of those heartless eyes. But she felt their hurt though she could see them no longer. The smith was close at hand now; she raised her eyes to him, half-shyly. He had seen Mrs. Brown; seen too the quick embarrassed turn of Maisie's head—and understood.

He stopped beside her and, looking beyond her straight at Mrs. Brown, said in his deep loud voice.

“Weel, Maisie! Ye’re a sight for sair e’en. I’m awfu’ gled tae see ye. Dalbean has no’ been the same place since the bonniest lass in it left it.”

Mrs. Brown heard no more. She banged into Peter Strang's shop in high dudgeon; and while she kept a strict watch to see that that pillar of orthodoxy gave her full weight, she poured out her soul to him:

"She's nocht but a shameless hizzy. A lass wi' a blot like yon on her name should hide her face, instead o' sitting there brazening it oot. I'm sorry for John Cargill an' Jess. I've nae peety for her."

"Nor me!" said Peter. "It's a' the daein' o' the Free Kirk minister an' his wife. She's waur than him, Mrs. Broon. I ken it was her that made him tak' paper intae the pulpit, an' a wumman that wull dae that is foondamentally bad. An' wull ye believe it: she comes tae see that lass every day—bringing her a' sorts o' denties. The wumman has nae proper appreciation o' sin. Mrs. Broon, the Cameronians are the only fowk that ken what's richt, an' practise it," and Peter pursed up his thin lips with smug self-satisfaction.

"Thank ye, Peter!" said Mrs. Brown. "I'm only peyin' ye for five eggs the day. Ane I got frae ye last week was bad."

"Umphm!" grunted Peter. "Are ye shure ye got it frae me?"

Mrs. Brown took her departure with her purchases. On the doorstep she paused to dart another harsh look at the back of Maisie's head. The smith, who was still talking to the girl, caught it full in his eye. He placed a big hand

very gently on Maisie's golden hair and patted it.

"Weel, I'll hae tae be gettin' on, lass. But I'm prood tae hae had a crack wi' ye. I'll be seein' ye again afore lang."

With a few long strides he caught up on Mrs. Brown, who opened battle at once.

"Sam'l Delap!" she snapped, "I'm astonished at ye! It's easy seen ye hae nae dochters o' yer ain or ye wadna be saft-sawderin' Maisie Cargill like yon."

"If I had a dochter," answered the smith, "I wad be gey prood tae hae sic a bonnie ane."

"Sam'l, I'm ashamed o' ye. What are guid looks without guid character? She's a rale bad lass, a perfect disgrace to Dalbean; she should never hae come hame."

"That's no' for you tae judge, Mrs. Broon. The lass has been sairly wranged, an' she's suffered for it. Ye've only tae look in her face tae see that."

"Sair wranged!" snorted Mrs. Brown. "As though she wasna tae blame hersel'. What dae ye think she's been dacin' in London a' these years since her misfortune? Tell me that, Sam'l!" Mrs. Brown was walking sideways in her wrath, her body turned towards the smith so that she might hurl her venomous darts with better aim.

The ugly insinuation in her last words rendered the smith speechless for a moment; but when he recovered he said quietly:

"Mrs. Broon! Dae ye ca' yersel' a releegious wumman?"

"I mak' nae boast," she replied, "but I howp I've got the grace o' God in ma hert."

The smith laughed—a loud bellow.

"The grace o' God in yer hert! Then it's a peety it never gets the length o' yer tongue."

Mrs. Brown darted a vindictive glance at him, but it was as impotent to hurt him as an arrow to penetrate armour-plate.

"She's a shameless baggage! No' content wi' comin' hame, an' openin' an auld sore in her mither's hert, she sits yonder as unblushin' an' conceited as if naething had ever happened. If I was her I'd hide ma heid wi' shame."

The smith looked down at the sour plain face at his side, all twisted with anger. A ready retort was on his tongue, but he kept it there.

Mrs. Brown, misinterpreting his silence as an acknowledgment of defeat, continued to splutter venom. Her garrulousness delivered her into his hands.

"There's nae self-respect left in some o' the risin' generation. Noo! whan I was a lass I wad like tae hae seen the man that daured tae tak' ony liberty wi' me. I'm proud tae think that my guid name was something tae me—I kept my virtue unspotted."

The smith whistled softly, and looked up at the sky. "Dae ye min' what Napoleon said?" he asked.

"What Napoleon?" snorted Mrs. Brown.
"Him that's mentioned in Revelations?"

"Aye! the very same."

"Weel, what did he say?"

"He said," answered the smith slowly, so that every word might sink in, "that it's aye easy tae haud a fortress that naebody would want tae attack."

The blow got home and for the rest of her life there was bad blood between Mrs. Brown and Sam'l Delap. She bounced away from him, and darted down the wynd. The smith walked on complacently towards the smiddy—a smile on his face.

"O' a' the venomous besoms!" he said to himself. "But that'll learn her! It wasna a bad idea tae gi'e Napoleon the credit o' that ane. It lent it mair wecht."

Summer melted into autumn and the fell disease that had laid a hand upon Maisie took a more relentless grip. She drooped like a delicate flower, and to her natural beauty there was added an ethereal loveliness that was not of this earth. And with this fresh beauty came an added gentleness. Even the birds that twittered in the garden hedge saw it, and one of them became her constant friend. He was a perky little robin, who would settle on her hand and with head on one side as though he understood listen to the little whispered words with which she welcomed him. From her hand he would hop to her shoulder, and from her shoulder to her

head and then with a little pipe of glee he would dart off to the hedge again. She called him "Cheeky" because of his self-assurance; and daily in the garden she watched for his coming.

With a warm charity that was utterly beyond the comprehension of Peter Strang, the minister's wife visited the girl every day; and the minister sometimes accompanied her, though sometimes he came alone. Maisie loved them both: but she feared the minister a little, for there was a load at her heart. At last she took courage to unburden herself one day when the minister had come unaccompanied.

"Before I went awa'," she said, "I was a member o' the Kirk. I should like tae 'come forrit' again. Daur I?" she asked.

"I am pleased that you ask," said the minister. "I shall see to that."

"But I'll hae tae 'staun' the Session,'" said Maisie hesitatingly, knowing the ordeal to which the laws and customs of the Kirks in Scotland subject those who have been guilty of "open sin" before they will permit them to approach the Lord's Table. The secret sins, which escape the eyes and the noses of the elders, are left to God, who is a Judge most merciful; the open ones are dealt with by the Session, which sometimes is not!

"I think we can spare you that," said the minister kindly. "I know what you have suffered; I know how you have sorrowed; God

has forgiven you. We must not add to your affliction."

She took the minister's hand in her own transparent one. There was gratitude in her shy touch and gratitude in her shining eyes.

The minister told his wife what he had undertaken. She patted him on the back. "Well done, old sober-sides!" she said. "Your Session is not fit to sit in judgment on Maisie. There's not one among them half so worthy. She has been cleansed by fire. They daren't refuse her her token."

The Sabbath of the Sacrament was near at hand; the Session was gathered in the vestry. Four self-conscious and unhappy young people had declared the faith that was in them, and had endorsed its validity by proof from the Catechism and Holy Writ. They were now waiting in the unlighted kirk for the verdict of the Session and the right hand of fellowship. Beyond the closed door of the vestry the minister was speaking:

"You have seen and examined the four young people whom I have prepared for admission. Is it your will that they receive their tokens?"

The senior elder spoke. "They seem tae hae a proper grup o' the doctrine, an' tae be weel-daein' lads and lasses. I think they're worthy tae come forrit."

"Agreed!" mumbled the Session with one voice and the minister nodded to the Clerk, who made a note in his minute book.

The minister cleared his throat with a little nervous cough.

"There is one other person who desires to be admitted—to be readmitted I should say—for she was once a communicant. Need I tell you I mean Maisie Cargill—the youngest daughter of John and Jessie Cargill. You know her story. She sinned; she has suffered; she is penitent. I have had many talks with her. I am convinced that her penitence is very real, and that her faith is sincere and beautiful. Is it your will that she be readmitted to full membership?"

The minister knew he had taken a bold step; and he sat back in his high chair and looked at the dour, weather-beaten faces of the men at the table before him. There was a pause, and then Davie Miller spoke:

"Moderator," he said, "I can vouch for a' ye say. I've had converse wi' the lassie masel'. She's worthy; quite worthy. I move that we grant her her 'token.'"

Now in every Session there is a member whose function it is, and his joy, to object. David Urquhart spoke up:

"Moderator! I submit that this is maist irreg'lar. The law o' the Kirk provides a method for dealin' wi' sic cases; an' I think it would be a peety no' tae observe it. Let this young wumman compear before us that she may be examined as to the nature an' occasion o' her sin; let us hear and judge as to her penitence;

let us examine her as to her faith ; an' then decide. I submit, sir, that is the proper procedure, usually observed in sic cases ; an' I move accordingly."

His nearest neighbour kicked him savagely on the shin, and whispered : " Ye've a lot o' richt tae talk "—but made no open suggestion.

The minister looked at the Session again. " I know," he said, " my suggestion is irregular ; but the conditions are unusual. The girl is dying. She is unfit to appear before us here : are we to take upon ourselves to debar a dying child—she is little more than that—from the table of the Lord ? Think, and think well, before you take that step."

The hard faces before him softened. The men looked at each other, and saw each other's eyes, then they looked quickly away, some at the floor, some into vacancy.

" In the circumstances," said Urquhart, " I waive ma objection, though I'm richt, as ye a' ken, on a maitter o' Kirk law."

" The letter killeth, David ! " said the minister. " We live by the spirit."

So it was agreed that Maisie should receive her " token "—the outward and visible sign that she was reconciled to the Church of her fathers.

Next day was the " Fast Day," and when the afternoon service was over, and the " tokens " had been distributed to the congregation, the minister made his way to John Cargill's house. He found Maisie in the garden, her friend little

"Cheeky" on her shoulder. At his coming the bird flew away. He sat beside the girl and talked quietly for a time, and then he said:

"Maisie, I have brought you your 'token.'" He placed the little metal disk in the girl's hand, and as she took it her eyes filled. "This do in remembrance of Me," she read, half aloud. "Oh! I'm glad, glad, glad, that I'm held tae be worthy again," she cried. "I ken I'm no'—but I'm glad."

"There are none of us worthy," said the minister gently, "and many of us are less worthy than you, Maisie. I fear you will not be able to be with us on Sabbath; but your 'token' is a sign that we who know you best believe you love Him who laid down His Life for the sheep."

He talked to her for a little while, and then with a word of quiet prayer he left her.

III

A hoïy stillness brooded over Dalbean on the Sabbath of the Sacrament. The clang of the bells was mellow—their notes more reverent. The worshippers walked a little more slowly, and talked a little more quietly on the road to the kirk. They were weighed down by the solemnity of the rite in which they were about to take a part; and many of them were examining themselves without ruth to see if they were worthy. New Year's Day and Sacrament Sabbath are the great occasions in the life of a

Scot for self-scrutiny and new resolutions. The New Year resolutions are often broken before the day is over ; the vows of Sacrament Day are often kept for a life-time. For the Sacrament is an oath of allegiance.

Maisie's father had carried her into the garden and set her in her chair, happing her warmly up, before he put on his Sabbath coat. He looked at her fragile figure, and her sweet face with the large and tender eyes, and then bent down and kissed her. " I'll be thinkin' on ye," he said, with a lump in his throat, and Maisie understood. For thus does a reticent Scot speak of his prayers. Her mother came out, simply but neatly dressed, with new black satin bonnet-ribbons tied in a bow under her chin. She stood beside Maisie's chair for a moment, and then laid a gentle hand upon her head—" Maisie, lass," she whispered, " I canna gang forrit till I tell ye I'm sorry I sent ye yon letter. I wrote it in bitterness : I've regretted it wi' tears. The Lord nicht turn me frae His Table as I turned ye frae yer faither's hoose. Can ye forgi'e me ? "

" Mither ! " cried Maisie brokenly, as she stretched her eager arms up to her mother's neck and drawing her worn face down kissed her forgiveness. There were tears in Jess's eyes, and tears in Maisie's ; but neither spoke any more.

John Cargill was ready now—the last speck of dust brushed from his faded black coat. He called his wife from Maisie's side and at the garden gate her father and mother turned and

waved their farewell. Then they took the kirkward road.

The girl lay back in her chair and, closing her eyes, fell to dreaming. She was very weary. Far off she saw a great and crowded God's Acre, with no kirk to hallow it—and a little white stone marking a tiny grave. How lonely it looked! But God could read the words upon it, and would understand.

"Cheeky," the robin, who had been watching from the hedge, gave a little chirrup and flew to the arm of her chair. Maisie opened her eyes and looked at him. The rusty red of his buckler wakened a memory. Was it true that his breast was red because it was stained at The Cross? Perhaps it was no more than a pretty fancy, but she wondered and gazed at him tenderly. Unable to answer the question in her eyes the robin flew away.

Her thoughts followed her father and mother. They would be nearing the kirk now. The bell was tolling more slowly. How sweetly it sounded! She could see the plate with its white damask covering set in the porch, and the elders with their white ties standing near it. The folk were dropping their tokens into the plate as they passed. She drew her own token out and looked at it lovingly: "This do in remembrance of Me." The church bell stopped. In fancy she was inside the kirk, saw the table below the pulpit, covered with a fair white cloth, saw the damask-covered book-boards of the pews. The

kirk was full, but she picked out her father and mother in their seat below the gallery, and saw Acre-end, as he passed up the aisle with creaking boots, stop and whisper something to her father. In fancy she could hear what he said : he was asking after her. It was sweet to be remembered.

She closed her eyes again and dreamed for a little once more ; then she raised her token to her lips and kissed it.

Her thoughts wandered back to the kirk. She could see the elders bringing in the bread and wine, walking reverently. She could feel the hush that had fallen on the congregation. A quiet peace filled her tired heart. She closed her eyes again : she could hear the folk singing. Softly she sang to herself, under her breath, in unison with them.

The minister was standing behind the table now. He had opened his Testament. She took her own from her breast and found the place : " For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." The old words, heard so often in her childhood, had a new fragrance. She read quietly, pondering every line. " But let a man examine himself "—she laid her book down on her knees, and clasping her thin hands thought long and earnestly. Then with a new confidence she picked up her Testament and read to the end of the chapter.

The minister was praying now. Perhaps he was remembering her. Yes ! she could hear him. " Like as a father pitieth his children "—

that was meant for her, she knew : her father, with brow pressed hard on the book-board, would be " thinking on " her. She was happy ; but so weary, and she dreamed again. After a little while she opened her eyes and looked round the garden. The breath of autumn had touched the flowers, many of them were falling to pieces, but there was ripening fruit on the trees and the sun was mellowing it, and she thought of another garden with a rock-hewn empty tomb. " Our hope is in a risen Lord," the minister had said. She opened her Testament again and found the passage :

" The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre." Mary !—and across the gulf of the years the heart of the dying girl leaped in understanding to that other woman who had sinned, because she loved much ; but who, because her love had become a holy thing, had gone to seek her Lord.

She read on quietly : " She, supposing Him to be the gardener"—Maisie raised her head : " The Gardener ! Mary ! to whom so much had been forgiven, did not know her Lord when she saw Him ; she thought He was the gardener ! A little smile played on Maisie's face.

" I think I'd ken Him if He cam'," she said, half aloud, and looked expectantly down the garden walk between the box borders. But there was no one there ; nothing but the robin hopping on the gravel.

She placed her token on her knees and turned to the open page again :

“ Jesus saith unto her ‘ Mary ! ’ ”—no, it was not Mary—surely that gentle voice said “ Maisie.” Yes! it said “ Maisie ”—she could hear it so clearly, so sweetly.

She looked eagerly round the garden again, but there was no one there. She sighed—a little, quivering, long-drawn breath—she was so weary she would close her eyes and sleep. Her beautiful head drooped, she sank lower in her chair. Her token dropped from her knees and lay shining on the ground. Her little Testament slipped from her hand and fell beside it.

The robin, hearing the sound, hopped up to her feet. He turned his head to one side and looked at her, so fair, so strangely still. Then he fluttered up, and, perching on the arm of the chair, fluted his little song in which there was no sorrow.

IX

WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES

IN Dalbean men do not talk readily of their souls. To do so would render one suspect of spiritual indecency. We would as little think of parading our naked souls before the public gaze as our unclad bodies. A man's soul is something to keep hidden—more so a woman's, while to talk of the relationship of one's soul to its Maker, except with hushed awe and in fear and trembling, savours to us of wanton godlessness.

So, when Duncan Sloss, the shepherd at Acre-end, proclaimed boldly that he was converted, the smiddy at once took his case to a vizandum.

"Hae ye heard about Duncan Sloss?" asked Ezra Snubb. "He says he's saved."

If he had declared himself eternally lost the look of awe that spread from the smith's face to Willie Shed's and from Willie Shed's to Jamie Kerr's and from Jamie Kerr's to Davie Miller's could not have been deeper, nor could they have shaken their heads more lugubriously.

"Dae ye ken ocht about it, Ezra?" asked the smith.

"Nae mair than I've heard at second-haun'," answered Ezra. "I believe he cam' under the spell o' a Methody preacher in Whinburn wha ca's hissel' the 'Convict-evangelist.' He hauds forth in the High Street, an' preaches in jail claes wi' his wrists hand-cuffed, an' his ankles shackled wi' a chain. They tell me he's got the gift o' the gab."

"They've a' got that," interjected Willie Shed. "Is there ony body o' scun' doctrine in the man—or is it a' froth?"

"I've never heard him masel'," said Ezra, "but I'm credibly informed that he's dune a great wark in the public-hooses o' Whinburn."

"Nae doot!" said Jamie Kerr, "if he's an auld convict he's weel acquaint wi' public-hooses. As like as no' he's dune a great wark in them before. Did he catch Duncan there?"

"I believe sae," answered Ezra. "Ye ken he aye likit his dram, an' he's been owre the score mony a time on market day. Weel! if I've got the story richt, in comes the evangelist, an' mak's straicht for Duncan, an' tae mak' a lang story short Duncan cam' hame tae Acre-end that nicht singin'."

Willie Shed laughed aloud. "He's often dune that afore; I've heard him. No' very releegious sangs either."

"But this time," interrupted Ezra, "he was singin' a hymn."

"What kin' o' hymn?" asked Davie anxiously.

“ Oh ! some saft kin’ o’ rubbish the evangelist had learned him. It hadna the smeddum o’ a psalm, or even a paraphrase.”

The smith scratched his chin with his thumb. He spoke oracularly.

“ The case is serious. Has this sudden profession been followed by ony marked improvement in his daily walk an’ conversation ? ”

No one answered : but the smith whispered to Jamie Kerr, who laughed quietly—“ The meenister couldna hae pit it better.”

At this moment Peter Strang entered the smiddy. The smith welcomed him—“ The very man I want tae see, Peter. Hae ye heard aboot Duncan Sloss ? ”

“ I saw him this very day ! ” answered Peter.

“ Weel ! ” said the smith, “ if it’s no’ breakin’ a confidence I believe he was owin’ ye a considerable account. Has he peyed it ? ”

“ That’s naeboddy’s business but mine,” answered Peter testily, “ but in the circumstances I dinna min’ sayin’ he’s settled it.”

“ That’s ane tae his credit, Peter. Did he say ocht o’ himsel’ ? ”

“ Aye ! ” answered Peter. “ He cairried on in a gey queer way. He peyed his account, an’ then he took me by the haun’, an’ said, ‘ Brither, are ye saved ? ’ ”

“ An’ what did you say, Peter ? ” asked Davie.

Jamie Kerr sucked in his hollow cheeks and Willie Shed leaned forward eagerly.

" 'Duncan,' says I, 'ye've nae richt tae speak that gait. Hoo should I ken?—I hope sae.' "

" An' what did he answer? " asked the smith.

" 'Brither!' says he, 'ye *should* ken. I'm saved.' "

" An' what did you say? " asked Willie Shed.

" I telt him no' tae speak lichtly o' sic a serious maitter. "

The smith and Davie Miller nodded their heads approvingly. " I dinna like that word 'brither,' " said the smith.

" I dinna like it masel', " answered Peter. " In sic a connection it's an insult. "

" Noo that I think on't, " said Davie Miller, straightening his bent back a little, " Duncan never cairries his drink weel. "

" What's that got tae dae wi't? " asked Willie, his reddish eyes roving over the group.

" It's got everything tae dae wi't, " answered Davie. " A heid that canna cairry drink gets upset wi' releegious intoxication juist as easy. "

" That's a fac'! " exclaimed the smith. " In ma ain min' I've aye thocht that us Scots can cairry oor drink weel, in a general mainner o' speakin', because we were brocht up on the catechism. "

" What's the catechism got tae dae wi' drink? " asked Peter Strang angrily.

" Naething directly, " answered the smith, " but it strengthens the heid, an' a strong heid can cairry its dram. "

" There's no muckle intoxication about the

catechism," said Willie Shed, "but it's dry eneuch tae drive a man tae drink."

"Wheesht! Wullie," said the smith, "this is a serious maitter."

"Whan did this queer change come owre Duncan?" asked Peter. "I've heard nae details."

"A week last Setterday," said Ezra, and he repeated the story.

"An' was he the only brand plucked frae the burnin' on this occasion?" asked Peter, his left hand under his beard.

"No! I believe there were ithers," said Ezra. "The evangelist's a heid-coonter."

"So that's his kin', is it?" said the smith. "I see! He coonts his bag every nicht like a sportsman, tae see hoo many birds he's brocht down."

"I wunner if he's mair set on heids than sowls?" said Willie.

"I canna stan' that kin' o' releegion, ava'," said Peter. "It's fundamentally unsoun'. Whaur's the conviction o' sin; whaur's the rale repentance? Christians arena made in a meenite. Sanctification's a wark, no' an act."

"Aye! we ken oor catechisms," interjected Davie, "but ye maunna forget, Peter, that there's sic things as sudden conversions in the Buik. What about Paul?"

Peter's face twisted in a supercilious smile.

"But Paul was a man; Paul was worth

savin'—while Duncan——” And he spread his open hands, palms upwards, deprecatingly.

The smith spoke: “There’s lots o’ fowk mair anxious tae be saved, than tae mak’ their souls worth savin’. It seems tae me the last’s what they should aim at first.”

“Aye!” said Peter. “I agree wi’ ye there. There’s a lot o’ speeritual pride in some o’ thae sudden conversions. Some fowk think they’re conferrin’ an honner on the Almichty by sayin’ they’re saved. There’s nae fear an’ tremblin’ about them.”

“It’s no’ a thing tae boast lichtly o’,” said Davie Miller solemnly, “but it’s a graun’ thing tae howp for. As for me, elder though I am, I’ll never be quite certain till I fin’ masel’ ayont the Gate an’ I’ll be owre humbled then tae boast about it.”

Peter nodded his head. “Aye!—but ye’ll no’ win there unless ye’re ane o’ the Elect; an’ ye canna join them juist by haudin’ up yer haun’ at a revival meetin’.”

There was silence for a moment. Then the smith spoke.

“We’re no’ gettin’ muckle further forrit in oor consideration o’ Duncan’s case; an’ on the evidence afore us I dinna see hoo we can mak’ up oor min’s.”

“We’re no’ called tae dae so. We’re no’ oor brither’s keeper,” said Peter testily.

“I ken!—but there’s some satisfaction tae a very natural curiosity as tae whether the brand

has been plucked frae the burnin' properly ; or whether the puir man's deceivin' himself. Besides, we've got tae think o' the guid name o' Dalbean. We maun hae nae wanton boasters soilin' oor name by claimin' tae be saved an' then backslidin'."

"Time will show !" said Jamie Kerr.

"Aye ! that it will !" said Peter.

"But we dinna want tae wait," said Willie Shed.

"It's the custom," said the smith reflectively, "for the Synod tae send a depitation frae time tae time, tae the various Kirks in the Presbytery tae look intae their speeritual condition. I wad suggest we follow a like procedure in this case. Let's fin' oot if there's ony change in Duncan's hame life ! Let's see if he tak's the Buik ? "

"That's no' a bad notion," said Miller. "I ken he didna use tae."

"Weel," said the smith, "suppose Wullie Shed here gangs up tae Duncan's the morn's nicht, and Jamie Kerr gangs up the nicht efter, an' suppose they juist hide themselves ootside, near eneuch tae hear if he tak's the Buik, but no' near eneuch tae be seen—an' let them report tae us next Monday nicht."

"That's a very commendable suggestion," said Peter, and the others nodded approval.

"The sederunt is at an end," said the smith, imitating the minister.

When Monday evening came the smith was

sitting on the anvil like a judge on the bench when the others arrived.

Willie Shed, a twinkle in his ferrety eyes, slithered in suddenly and, as always, made for the oil pourie.

He was followed by Jamie Kerr. There was a grin on his leathern face as he passed the time o' day with the smith. In a moment Peter Strang and Davie Miller arrived. They were arguing hotly about Predestination. The smith caught their final words:

"I tell ye," said Peter, "it was Predestination that brocht us doon tae the smiddy the nicht."

"That's as may be," answered Davie, "but it was Free Wull that made us come in at the door. We nicht hae stopped ootside."

The smith interrupted them:

"The coort is noo assembled," he said. "Let's hear the witnesses. Wullie! what hae you tae say?"

The stonemason dropped the pourie, and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"Aye!" he said, "he tak's the Buik richt eneuch. I hid between the water-barrel an' the door and at half ten clapped my lug tae the winda. He began wi' the singin'."

"I hope it wasna a hymn!" said Peter.

"No!" said Willie, "it was a psalm. They sung fowre verses."

"An' what did he read?" asked the smith.

"He read a psalm tae."

"That was non-committal," said Ezra. "A Jew micht read a psalm."

"Did he pit up a word?" asked Davie Miller.

"Aye! a lang ane," answered Willie.

"Oot o' a buik?" asked Peter snappishly.

"Hoo should I ken?" said Willie. "I couldna see, for the blin' was doon. I could only hear."

"But did it no' soun' like a read ane?" asked Peter.

"Weel, it was fluent eneuch. He never stopped for a word—an' some o' them were big anes. As like as no' he read it."

Peter looked at Davie Miller triumphantly and nodded his head. "I thocht as muckle," he said. "It was oot o' a book richt eneuch, Wullie. Tak' my word for't. The man's no' saved, ava'."

"Haud yer wheesht, Peter!" said the smith. "Let's hear what Jamie Kerr has got tae say."

Jamie laughed. "Duncan's a' richt," he said. "Nae sneakin' behin' water-barrels, an' eaves-droppin' for me." He winked maliciously at Willie. "I went tae the door like a man an' chappit; Duncan opened it hisselt. He said he was rale glad tae see me, an' askit me in."

"Did he ca' ye brither?" asked Peter sourly.

"He kent better!" answered Jamie with a grin.

"Did he speir if ye were saved?" asked Miller.

"He kent better!" ejaculated Willie Shed, feeling he was repaying Jamie in his own coin.

Jamie ignored the elder's question and the stonemason's jibe.

"We had a great crack about sheep and kye, an' things, me an' Duncan an' his better half an' the twa lads. An' at half-ten he took the Buik. 'Wull ye join us,' says he; an' I said 'Aye!'"

"What did he sing?" asked Peter.

"The 121st Psalm—tae the tune French. It went wi' a birr."

"Aye! racing through it! nae proper reverence," snarled Peter.

"An' the readin'?" asked the smith.

"He read about the cleansin' o' the temple."

"Very guid!" said the elder.

"But what about the prayer?" asked Peter anxiously. "Did he pray oot o' his heid, or oot o' a buik?"

"Oot o' his hert," answered Jamie emphatically. "He had nae buik."

"Are ye shure he had neither buik nor paper hidden between his airms on the chair bottom?" asked Peter, still sticking to his point.

"As shure as death!" said Jamie firmly.

"Hoo dae ye ken?" asked Peter.

"Frae internal evidence!"

"Whit dae ye mean?" snapped Peter.

"Weel!" said Jamie. "Duncan was prayin' fine—gettin' some graun' words off his tongue, I can tell ye, when he suddenly lowered his voice an' groaned, an' then wi' terrible seriousness he

said, 'An' O Lord, tae whom naething is impossible, hae mercy on Wullie Shed the stane-mason—he needs it badly—an' break the proud and self-satisfied spirit o' Peter Strang the grocer—he's as soor as a slae.' ”

Peter gasped. His sallow, wrinkled face went purple.

The smith's voice boomed through the heavy silence :

“The verdict o' the coort is that Duncan Sloss is soun'ly converted.”

X

PETER STRANG FINDS HIS SOUL

I

PETER STRANG drew aside the curtain from the deep-set window of the room behind the shop, and looked through the December darkness up the hill to the Manse. One window was lit up : it had been for more than a month, and for that time Peter had peeped at it every night before he went to bed.

"It's a judgment on him," he muttered as he turned to the fireplace and proceeded to remove the larger pieces of half-burnt coal.

"An' him in his prime—and me seventy-wan past," he said to the coals.

He was a little bowed man, wizened as though the east wind had dried all the blood out of him. His face appeared sallow and wrinkled in the firelight as a walnut shell ; his clean-shaven chin shone above the ragged beard that hid his neck.

"Aye ! a judgment ! I kent it wad come."

For twelve years there had been a feud between Peter and the Free Kirk minister. It had begun with the minister's coming. A young man, with young enthusiasms, he had tried to bring his

church at Dalbean into line with those city churches in which he had served his apprenticeship. Now those who knew Dalbean forty years ago will remember that though its politics were radical its views on worship were conservative. Its heart cleaved to the old paths. For the old paths were like sheep tracks on the hills. They were safe; they had served for many years; they could be trusted to lead to good pasturage; they had been trodden by the feet of the patriarchs. Whereas the new paths were "kittle." They might be all right, but, on the other hand, they might lead to Rome or to Perdition, which, according to the Presbyterian opinion of Dalbean, was only a few steps further down the same road. So why run a risk for the mere sake of change? Thus argued the stalwarts, shaking their heads ominously. But the new minister saw with quick intuition that the substance of religion was being lost in its shadows. So he began to make changes. He gave out a paraphrase at each service: in the days of Dr. Auld no paraphrase had ever been sung in the Free Kirk at Dalbean. That was his first offence, and Peter was inclined to regard it as nothing more than a youthful indiscretion. But worse was to come. At prayer the bulk of the congregation stood---not always reverently, with bowed head, but sometimes with a shoulder heavy-pressed against the wall, as one may buttress the outside of a too-hospitable inn. And they sat at the singing.

The minister altered that: thereafter all stood at the singing except Peter; all sat with bowed head at the prayers, save Peter, who stood defiantly. He fought with the minister wordily.

The minister, being charitable, made allowances for Peter's ecclesiastical conservatism, and forgave him.

Over the counter of his shop Peter uttered warnings and prophecies.

"Aye! Mrs. McLumpha, it's the best Ayrshire roll. Twa pun' did ye say? Thank ye!" and as he cut the bacon he would add: "Mark my words. It's the thin end o' the wedge. There's waur tae come. It's eneuch tae mak' Dr. Auld, godly man, turn in his grave. I dinna haud wi't, ava'."

Later came the hymns, and Peter left the kirk. No overtures from the minister, no deputation from the Session had the least effect on him. To the latter he spoke his mind: "Ye're a lot o' fules. The young man's leadin' ye straicht tae Perdition. Ye can gang yersel's; I'm no' comin'."

So, instead of following the broad and easy path, Peter walked ten miles every Sabbath, five there and five back, to the Cameronian Kirk at Blackwater, where things were more to his liking, and where the old customs still survived.

A bitter hatred sprang up and waxed strong in his heart against the minister at De'bean.

He, good man, bore Peter's defection stoically; passed a cheerful "Good-day" to Peter whenever he met him, to which Peter made no response, and still continued to purchase his modest weekly supply of tobacco in Peter's shop. Peter always served him in silence.

"I wush he'd tak' his custom elsewhere," said Peter in a burst of confidence to the blacksmith. "I kent what it wad be as sune as I saw him wi' paper in the pulpit. First the paper; syne the paraphrases; then the hymns, and noo, I hear, a harmonium. Guid help Dalbean."

"Ye're makin' an awful lot oot o' naething, Peter. We maun move wi' the times," answered the smith.

Peter spread both his hands flat on the counter and looked savagely at the smith. "Nae doot Aaron said the same thing when he made the gowden calf. It's a pernicious doctrine," he growled.

And now, after twelve years of faithful service, during which he had seen the spiritual life of his congregation thrill with a new vitality, the minister lay dying.

"I hear it's a growth," said Mrs. Brown to Peter as he handed her the twopenny packet o' "carraways" with which she was wont to dispel "the win' roon' the hert," an' there's nae hope. So the Professor said that cam' frae Glesca."

"Whit was I tellin' ye?" said Peter.

Night after night he looked through his back

window at the light in the room where the minister lay dying.

"Aye! it's a judgment," he muttered again as he knelt by the fire to say his evening prayers.

Now the God that Peter worshipped was a strange God—a stern fetish stolen from the Israelites, and pickled in the vinegar that was in Peter's heart. Peter feared this God—he was afraid of Him. He knelt, and addressed his God for five minutes by the clock. Then he rose from his knees—"Aye! a judgment," he repeated; and passed his hand over his forehead. His hand touched the edge of his cap. He started, and looked, half-frightened, round the room. He had said his prayers with his cap on! Would the earth open and swallow him as it did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? His knees shook. Viciously he tore off his cap, and flung it petulantly on the horsehair sofa. Then he knelt down again and repeated his prayers. He rose relieved. The earth had not yet gaped. So, having made his peace with his Maker, he took his candle and went up to bed.

II

Peter woke at the back of six o'clock. He looked through the window: the light in the minister's room still burned.

The earth was carpeted with thick snow, and a few flakes were still falling.

He dressed and went downstairs and lit the kitchen fire.

The coal saved from the grate last night was replaced on the burning sticks—for Peter wasted nothing—neither fuel nor affection.

As he waited for the kettle to boil a knock came at the door. He raised his eyes to the clock. It was early for a customer! Who could it be?

He went through the shop, and unlocking the door threw it open. A young woman stood on the threshold, with a bundle in her arms. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks rosy.

"Good mornin', Mr. Strang," she said; "can I come in?"

Peter stood aside to let her pass, then closing the door went to his place behind the counter.

"I'm no' open till half-nine," he said. "But I'll obleege ye. Whit dae ye want?"

"Oh!" said the girl, "I wisna wantin' tae buy onything; but I've walked three miles frae the station through the sna' wi' the bairn, and I've five mile tae travel yet, and I thocht maybe ye wad let me warm the wean at yer fire. I see ye've forgotten me—I'm Mrs. McTurk that was Jean Martin o' Laigh Burn. Ye min' me, dae ye no'?"

Peter did not commit himself, but asked:

"An' hoo cam' ye tae drap on me? There's ither hooses i' Dalbean."

The girl smiled. "Yours is the only lum I saw reekin', forbye the Manse, and I kent ye

were kind. I min' aince when I was a wee lass ye gi'ed me a poke o' sweeties when I brocht a message frae my auntie."

"I'd forgotten," said Peter, but there was a sudden glow round his heart. "Come awa' ben"—and he led the way to the back room.

The girl followed him and, unwrapping the wet shawl from the baby, laid him on a corner of the sofa. He was sound asleep; the shadow of a smile lay on his little face; his lips moved reminiscently.

Peter cast a look of suspicion at the infant.

"I heard ye ran awa' frae hame, lassie. I hope this is no' a child o' sin?"

The girl turned upon him fiercely with flashing eyes; then she smiled.

"That wasna like the kind Mr. Strang I mind o'. No! the bairn was born in wedlock; I've been mairrit twa year," and she stooped and kissed her child.

"Weel! weel! I meant no offence," said the stricken Peter. "Hing the shawl afore the fire, and ye can mask the tea; the caddie's on the dresser."

He stood for a moment in the middle of the room. Then he scratched his head, and with the back of his left hand pushed up his straggling beard over his chin. He always did this when puzzled. Then he went upstairs and brought down a blanket.

"Hap the bairn up," he said.

The mother did so, bending low and caressingly over the sleeping child.

Peter disappeared into the shop and in a moment came back with a plateful of bacon and eggs.

"The frying-pan's behin' the door. I'll just be tidyin' the shop, an' ye can gi'e me a cry when a's ready."

The girl set herself busily about the preparation of breakfast, humming a tune the while. Peter, sweeping the water-sprinkled floor of the shop, heard her. She was a bonnie lass—nobody could deny it, and he was doing a charitable act. But what would Dalbean think? It might lead to a scandal! A lass and a bairn in the back shop at half-past six in the morning! He had been a fool to let her in! The sweat began to break on his brow. While he was still in a quandary of perplexity, the girl called him. The meal was ready.

Peter opened the door in the counter and passed behind the green and gold pedestalled box with its white taps labelled respectively "Treacle" and "Golden Syrup." He placed his brush in a corner and went into the back room. The girl was bending over the baby, who was now awake, and lay crowing lustily, the blanket billowing over his kicking feet.

"Oh! Mr. Strang!" cried the mother, "come and look at the bairn. Isn't he a darling?"

Peter pushed his beard up over his chin, and

swallowed nervously. He knew nothing of babies. He had never seen a young one at close quarters before. He looked with quick furtiveness at the door which led to the shop, then he approached the sofa shyly.

"I ken nocht o' weans," he said, as he bent stiffly over the child.

The baby looked solemnly for a moment at the wrinkled face above him, then crowed delightedly, and with a chubby hand laid hold of Peter's beard. It was a new and fascinating toy.

Peter drew his head away slightly, but the baby held on firmly, laughing the while, and gurgling.

Peter put his hand up to relax the child's grip. Two chubby bare feet wriggled from under the blanket, and kicked Peter where his heart was supposed to be. Then the little hand opened and Peter was free. The baby lay back and gurgled again.

"It's as strong as a young stirk," said Peter, feeling that the occasion demanded some expression of opinion. His hay-coloured face had suddenly gone red. "Hoo auld will it be?"

"He's nine months the morn," answered the girl proudly, "an' I think he's ta'en a fancy tae ye, Mr. Strang. It's no' everybody he'll tak' tae. He kens a warm hert. Bairns are wiser than grown fowk, I think."

Peter and his guest sat down to breakfast while the baby crowed and gurgled on the sofa. From time to time the girl tossed little words of

endearment to her child, who answered with twinkling, understanding eyes, and cooing lips. Peter was silent: his world was all in a whirl. What had the girl said?—"He's ta'en a fancy tae ye." "He kens a warm hert." Peter's life suddenly seemed empty. He had been a lonely man.

"Are ye makin' for Laigh Burn?" he asked.

"Aye!" answered the girl. "Ye see, sin' I ran awa' me and my auntie that brocht me up ha'ena been frien's. At least, she hasna been frien'ly. I've written tae her often; but she's never sent me as muckle as a word. Maybe I was wrang tae rin awa', but it was for love, and there was nae ill in it."

"I see," said Peter. "Yer aunt has aye had the name o' being a dour buddy, but she's a guid woman!"

"I wunner!" said the girl. "Can onybody be guid if the hert's dried up? But onyway, I hear she's ill—near her hinner en'—and I thocht I maun come and see her, and let her see the bairn afore she dees. I bear her nae ill-will, and though she maybe disna love me, the bairn'll melt her."

"Umphm!" said Peter, his mouth full of Ayrshire roll.

He pushed his empty cup away, and with a moistened thumb gathered the last crumb from the edge of his plate.

"Whit dae ye feed it on?" he asked, looking towards the baby.

"He's no' weaned yet," answered the mother, blushing, "but he's no' hungry. An' noo," she added, laying her hand on the shawl that hung over the chair-back before the fire, "we'll hae tae tak' the road. Think ye kindly, Mr. Strang. Ye've been awfu' guid."

Peter grunted, and bending over the sofa looked through the window. From habit his eyes sought the Manse, but he lowered them and looked at the snow-covered road. The baby crowed, and with both feet kicked Peter lustily in the ribs.

Peter started, and looked down at the smiling infant.

"Ye wee rascal!" he said, and his voice was almost playful. He looked at the mother, and once again pushed his ragged beard over his chin. "I micht dae waur than gi'e ye a lift alang the road. It'll be heavy traivellin' wi' the bairn. I'll awa' oot and yoke the mear in the spring-cairt."

"Oh but, Mr. Strang," cried the girl, "that's far mair than I've ony richt tae expect. I canna hear o't."

"Say nae mair about it, wumman," growled Peter. "Them that expects least deserves maist," and putting his cap on he went out through the shop. As he slipped the collar over the mare's head he murmured: "Whoa, lass!" and in the same breath added: "Peter Strang, ye're a fule."

When he came back the girl was sitting before

the fire with the child asleep in her lap—a hand round its pink feet stretched towards the warmth.

“The cairt’s at the door. Here, gi’e it this,” and he held out a stick of rock.

“Oh! Mr. Strang,” said the girl, laughing, “the bairn’s owre young for sweeties.”

“Never min’,” said Peter, “keep it till it’s aulder.”

III

Peter climbed into the spring-cart first. The step was high. The girl standing in the snow looked up at him.

“Ye’ll hae tae tak’ the wean,” she said. Peter’s sallow face went crimson. He looked up and down the road anxiously.

“There’s naeboddy aboot,” he muttered, under his breath, and bending down held out his hands clumsily.

“Dinna let him fa’,” said the anxious mother, placing the precious burden between Peter’s outstretched palms. Then she climbed into the cart and took her treasure into her warm young arms.

On the five-mile journey Peter was almost silent.

He asked three questions.

“Whaur dae ye leeve?”

“In London—I left yesterday at five o’clock, and oh! Mr. Strang, in the hale o’ London I never met wi’ sic kindness as yours.”

The woman chatted briskly ; the baby slept ; the mare jogged on steadily.

At the second milestone Peter jerked his thumb at the baby : " Does it never greet ? " he asked.

" Oh aye !—whiles ; but no' often," said the mother. " He's a guid wean." And she buried her face in the recesses of the shawl.

Near the fourth milestone Peter whipped up the mare and asked suddenly ; " Are ye keepin' that bairn warm ? "

" Feel for yersel'," said the mother, and taking Peter's left hand she guided it inside the shawl. The infant, half awake, closed a chubby hand round Peter's little finger, but Peter drew it away. " I need baith haun's for drivin'," he said. " The road's slippy."

Half a mile from Laigh Burn he reined in the mare. " Ye'd better walk the rest," he said. " It's no' far."

He climbed out of the cart and held up his arms to receive the baby. The mother, bending over, placed the child within them. Awake once more, he gurgled at the sight of Peter's beard, and tugged it lustily.

" Ye wee rascal ! " said Peter, and the walnut-shell of his face shone.

" Ye've been mair than kind, Mr. Strang," said the girl, taking her baby from him. " I've never forgotten the poke o' sweeties ye gi'ed me, and I'll never forget yer kindness the day," and she held out her hand in farewell.

Peter climbed into the cart and turned home-

wards, but before urging the mare to a trot he looked back. The girl was standing in the middle of the road, and as Peter looked she took the child's arm from under the shawl and wagged it towards him. Peter waved back.

On the way home Peter thought deeply. "Gee-up, mear!" he shouted suddenly, to break the flow of his thoughts. He was seeing his naked soul—a misshapen shrivelled thing—and the vision frightened him. Thank God! the girl did not know him. Did the bairn? Bairns were uncanny creatures. Did his soul look like that to God? Peter shivered.

"I wunner when I gi'ed her the poke o' sweeties? It maun hae been mony a year sin'—fancy her mindin' a wee thing like that!"

The mare between the shafts, knowing that its master was paying no heed, slowed down to a quiet walk.

"A kind hert! I wunner," thought Peter. "Can onybody be guid if the hert's dried up," she had said.

The hornet sting of the whip-lash cut the mare on the shoulder.

"Gee-up!" cried Peter. "What are ye glowerin' at?" and the startled mare broke into a trot.

As the houses of Dalbean came within sight Peter whipped up the mare again.

"It wad be wakeness," he muttered, "after a dizzen years tae!"

When he reached home, he unyoked the mare

and went into the house. He stirred the fire noisily ; then he shaved his chin and upper lip with many grimaces, for his razor was blunt, and combed his hair.

He passed his finger meditatively through his straggling beard. " The wee rascal ! " he muttered, and for the first time in its existence his blurred and cracked looking-glass saw something like a smile on Peter's face. He poked the fire viciously again, then stood for a moment with one foot on the fender pushing his beard over his chin with the back of his left hand. Then he went out, locking the shop behind him.

Five minutes later Ezra Snubb, walking down the road, saw Peter knocking at the Manse door.

XI

“THIS LITTLE PIG WENT TO MARKET”

SOME men are born great, others have greatness thrust upon them. A “gossip keekin’ in the luif” of the newly born youngest son of Thomas Kilsyth of Whitehills might have foretold his coming greatness—but Joe Kilsyth himself, neither in boyhood nor manhood, ever gave token to the critical inhabitants of Dalbean that one day the English-speaking world would ring with his name. When that day came Dalbean was proud of itself: prouder of itself, if the truth must be told, than it was of Joseph, who had suddenly brought his birthplace into the public eye.

Joe had ambitions, or at least his mother had them for him, and when his father, in a temper, had stated categorically and with a “sweer-word” that Joe would never make a farmer his mother had vowed she would make him a minister. Now Joseph was a good and obedient lad—“a lad wi’ mair grace than pairts,” as the dominie said; but goodness and obedience are not the sole qualifications for the making of a minister in Scotland. The gateway to the scanty pastur-

age of the ministry is hard to pass without some scholarship, and Joseph lacked brains. But his piety was undoubted: his "call" was to himself a very live reality, and, thrice baffled by the examinations in Greek and Hebrew, he decided that the home ministry was not for him; he would offer for the Mission Field.

Now to enable a man to preach to the heathen a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is not a necessity. Instead, the work calls for a splendid selflessness, a whole-hearted devotion, a love that is stronger than death.

Joseph went to the Mission Field—to the Faraway Islands in the Southern Seas. There he laboured manfully, there he had fame thrust upon him, for he was clubbed and eaten by his flock. Questions were asked about his fate in the House of Commons, and, as the blood of her missionaries has often been the seed of the British Empire, a couple of gunboats were sent to Joseph's island, and the Union Jack now floats proudly over its coral reefs and its palms.

Dalbean was dragged into the limelight. Old inhabitants who had known Joseph as a boy were interviewed by reporters from the great daily papers, who took away with them sheaves of interesting stories, most of which were apocryphal—for Dalbean rose to the occasion.

In Joseph's death the pundits of the Missionary Society which had sent him out recognised a rare opportunity for stimulating interest in their

work, and they initiated a vigorous campaign in the churches. As Dalbean, or its immediate neighbourhood, was the birthplace of Joseph, special attention was directed to it, and a carefully chosen preacher was sent from headquarters to improve the occasion. He kindled the fire of missionary enthusiasm in his morning sermon, he blew it with the bellows of much windy eloquence in the afternoon, and he made it blaze by his stirring challenge on Sunday evening. It was a great day in Dalbean. The youngsters had never known the pulpit filled by a man so much to their liking, for the preacher, himself a missionary in the Faraway Islands, told hair-raising stories of native customs, and at the afternoon service exhibited native clubs and spears and other weapons of offence and defence and gave a passable imitation of the native war-cry. Whereat, more than one boy vowed that a missionary life was the life for him.

As a fitting climax to an arduous day of hectic eloquence he pronounced the benediction at the close of the evening service in the language of the island where he worked.

The general verdict on the day's ministrations was one of approval; but the voice of the critic was heard in the gloaming as the folk wended their way home.

"Did ye ever see sic a cairry on?" whispered Ezra Snubb to Willie Shed.

"I dinna haud wi' it ava, Ezra. It was mair like the circus than the kirk."

“Umphm ! Wullie, but ye wouldna get intae the circus for a penny.”

Willie ignored the rude thrust at his well-known parsimony. “An’ him pronouncin’ the benediction in yon gibberish, like a monkey girnin’ for a nit.”

“I ca’ it an insult tae the Almichty.”

“I wouldna gang as far as that, Ezra. Nae doot the Almichty wud unnerstaun’ what the man meant.”

“But can ye no see the surprise He’d get ? He’s aye been used tae hear English in the Dalbean pulpit. Yon wud fair scunner Him.”

Our awakened interest in missions showed itself in several ways. The missionary-box appeared on the dinner tables of Dalbean, and the halfpennies extorted from our rising generation as penalties for their bad table manners went to improve the morals—and, let us trust, the table manners—of the heathen in the South Seas, and a new game called “Playin’ at Missionaries” was invented by Jamie, the smith’s son. He claimed, because of its religious origin, that it was a game that might be played, in the secrecy of the plantin’, on a Sabbath afternoon. It was a great deal more to the liking of the boys than the catechism. “Effectual calling,” “What is sin ?” and other perplexing problems that aforetime were wont to engage the youthful intelligences of the parish on a Sabbath afternoon were of no interest in comparison. Jamie called it “Playin’ at Missionaries.” A stickler

for accuracy would have called it "Playing at Cannibals." There was always great competition for the office of cannibal chief, and none for that of missionary. He, poor victim, was chosen by lot.

The mothers of Dalbean regarded this sudden zeal for missions on the part of their sons as a sign of grace. Some of the fathers knew differently, but held their tongues.

Now no missionary worth his salt fails to emphasise the financial needs of the cause, and this one had made an impassioned plea for aid, and hurled a challenge at Dalbean. He had reminded us that ours was a rural parish: that one of our sons had laid down his life for the cause, and he besought us to raise a worthy memorial to the martyr of Dalbean—so he called Joseph, and we raised our chins proudly—by making it our aim to raise a larger sum for foreign missions annually than any other parish of the same size in Scotland. And although, as I have told, the voice of the critic was not silent, the pride of Dalbean was touched and many good resolutions were made.

Grizel Young, a spinster of acknowledged piety and unchallengeable chastity, who always wore three petticoats, had been shocked to hear that the women of the Faraway Islands wore no petticoats at all. It was bad enough to be a heathen; but to be a naked heathen was to her proper and petticoated mind anathema. So ere she went to bed she took from her desk the will

written in her own hand. Then she sharpened a quill, and added a codicil :

" I give and bequeath to the heathen of the Faraway Islands one copy of the Shorter Catechism with Proofs and my six pair of best Ayrshire blankets, to keep them warm by night, and to cover their nakedness by day," and she lay down to a dreamless sleep firm in the conviction that she had done a great thing for the cause of religion in the Southern Seas.

And up and down Dalbean that night the newly kindled enthusiasm for missions was seeking for channels through which to express itself.

" Alan ! " said Mrs. Blair to her husband, the guidman of Harleyknowe, as they sat by the fire after supper, " hoo muckle wull ye gi'e tae missions ? "

" Naething, Mary ! I dinna haud wi' them. I've gi'en owre muckle the day a'ready. I pit a fourpenny bit in the ladle—I thocht it was threepence."

" Oh, Alan ! an efter yon beautifu' discoorse. Ye're awfu' mean—as mean as Jamie Burnie."

" Ye should ken me better than tae say that, Mary ! I've never grudged ye ocht—or the bairns," and Harleyknowe picked up a live coal with the tongs and lit his pipe.

" But, it's a very special cause, Alan ! The needs o' the heathen are terrible, an' Joe Kilsyth was born at Whitehills juist owre the brae."

" I ken a' that, Mary ; an' if I knew the

particular heathen that ate him I'd send him an ounce o' Bogie roll for his pipe. He'll need something tae kill the taste o' Joe. The Kilsyths were aye a soor lot."

"Oh Alan! Alan! I'm ashamed tae hear ye speak. Ye're awfu' coorse an' ye've nayther grace nor feelin'."

"Maybe no', Mary! But I've still got some sense, thank God; an' prices are owre bad for me tae waste my money on naked heathen."

"There is that withholdeth, and it tendeth to poverty," quoted Mrs. Blair gently.

Her husband knew that she would have the last word, and as this was a gentle reproof he made no reply lest he should provoke her to something really bitter.

But Mrs. Blair, like all other women, having formed a resolution was not to be turned from it by any obstinacy on the part of a mere man—and he her husband. She had been deeply touched by the missionary's appeal and she felt it to be her duty to do something for such a splendid cause.

That night she lay awake long after the snores of her husband proclaimed him fast asleep. She was thinking of ways and means. Her frontal attack had met with a rude rebuff, but, being a woman, she was a strategist and did not accept defeat readily. Ere she slept her plans were thought out, and a pit was dug for her husband. Like Bruce's pits at Bannockburn, it was hidden carefully,—she concealed it

behind a silent tongue and an expressionless face. Alan fell into the pit the next afternoon at tea-time. He had been talking cheerfully about the state of the crops, and the improvement in the weather. She, behind the tea-cosy, was in a brown study, and seemed not to hear him. There was a far-off look in her eyes. Alan raised his voice.

"A penny for yer thochts, Mary."

Mary started suddenly, and lifted the cosy from the teapot. "I was thinkin' aboot the soo."

"What's wrang wi' her?"

"Naething, but there'll be a litter next week."

"I ken. What aboot it?"

"Wull ye gi'e me a wee pig, Alan?"

"What for?" he asked.

"Oh! I hae just ta'en a fancy I'd like ane."

Alan grunted—an appropriate thing to do at the moment—but made no articulate reply.

"I dinna often ask ye for muckle, Alan!"

"That's true, Mary. Weel, if there's mair than a dizzen in the litter ye can hae the sma'est ane."

"Thenk ye, Alan. Pass in yer cup—the tea's juist at its best," said Mary quickly, eager to get away from the subject as soon as she had won her point.

A few days later the live-stock at Harley-knowe was the richer by fourteen little pigs.

Mary and Alan studied them.

"A sturdy lot o' wee beggars," said Alan.

Mary reminded him of his promise.

"I said the sma'est ane, did I no'?"

"Yes," answered Mary dutifully.

"Weel! I've thocht better o't. Ye can tak' yer pick."

"Ye're rale kind, Alan," said Mary, surveying the litter with critical eyes. "I'll tak' the ane wi' the black spot on his left lug. He'll be easy tae ken," and she patted her husband on the arm.

Now the rearing of a family of fourteen little pigs is a problem in economics for the best-intentioned sow. In the pig-sty, as in that larger arena where men fight for their bread, the race is all too often to the swift and the battle to the strong, and many a little pig goes supperless to bed, its lustier brother having consumed more than his proper share of nourishment. But the little pig with the black spot on his left ear was from his birth a pampered child of fortune. He took his full share of his mother's bounty; but twice a day, in the middle of the morning and in the middle of the afternoon when her husband was away in the fields, Mrs. Blair would invade the sty, and seizing her squealing victim would bear him off to the kitchen. There, on a piece of sacking in her lap, his pink nose quivering rapturously, his beady eyes fixed in an ecstasy of greed, his mistress would feed him on warm milk and cream sucked through a cotton rag tied over the neck of a bottle. Little wonder that, like Jeshurun, the pig with

the ken-speckle spot on his ear waxed fat and kicked.

Alan, pipe in mouth, leaning over the wall of the sty on a Sunday afternoon, noticed his barrel-like rotundity with approval, and said to his wife at tea-time :

“Yon wee pig o’ yours is thriving, Mary. He’s the best o’ the bunch.”

“I’m pleased ye think sae,” answered Mary. “I think there’s a special blessing restin’ on him ; ye see he’s my contribution tae Missions ! ”

“Humph ! ” said Alan.

A day came when the little pigs were old enough to leave their mother. Eight of them went to market, and there passed out of our ken. The six that remained were placed in a roomy sty of their own next to that occupied by their fat and somnolent mother. Mary’s pig was too large to be bottle-fed any longer—but her solicitude for him did not cease. The feeding time of pigs is usually an hour marked by grunts and squeals and many shrill protestings. But at Harleyknowe when the pigs were fed pandemonium might have been let loose.

In previous years Mrs. Blair had entrusted the duty of feeding the pigs to a subordinate. But because she had a pig of her own she had developed a great interest in the inhabitants of the sty. So, twice a day she might have been seen crossing the cobbled yard, her skirt tucked round her waist, a heavy pail of warm swill in her left hand, a hefty besom in her right. She

would rest her besom against the sty door, and raising the pail carefully over the top of the wall, she would empty it into the great stone trough. There was a rush of jostling, slipping, grunting pigs, and in a moment six muzzles would be buried in the swill, six throats would be gulping greedily. Then the besom would come into action, and Mrs. Blair, carefully isolating the little pig with the spot on his left ear, would sweep the legs from under all his astonished brothers, leaving her own pig in sole possession of the trough with its glorious contents. Till that pampered lump of fatness had devoured his fill, no other pig dare venture again to approach the trough. His devoted owner saw to that—her besom a weapon that no pig dare pass. They rushed, they dodged, they jostled, they grunted, but a wide sweep of the besom and their legs went from under them again, and they slithered across the floor of the sty a squealing, tangled mass of angry swine. When Benjamin had gorged himself they were free to divide what was left in the trough. So Benjamin thrived most marvellously to the mystification of Alan, who chaffed his wife good-humouredly.

“Mary!” he said, “I never kent afore ye were sic a guid judge o’ a pig. When ye picked yon ane, ye picked a winner. He’s the biggest an’ the finest ever bred at Harleyknowe.”

December came, and the pigs went to the market at Whinburn. There were many other pigs in the mart that day, but none looked so

well-fed, none fetched so high a price as a pig from Harleyknowe with a black spot on his left ear.

At the end of the day Alan was having a parting dram in the Swan, with Acre-end.

"Yon was a graun' pig ye selt the day, Harleyknowe. I've rarely seen a better. What did ye rear it on?"

"It got the same as the ithers, naethin' mair."

"That's queer. Was it oot o' the same litter?"

"Aye!"

Acre-end drummed on the table with his finger-tips. "Hoo dae ye explain it, Harleyknowe?"

"It bates me. But the wife says it thrived best because it was a pig wi' a purpose. Ye see it belanged tae her, an' the price o't gangs tae the Kilsyth Memorial Mission Fund."

"Guidsakes!" said Acre-end, and he emptied his glass.

XII

SAM'L DELAP TURNS DOCTOR

WHEN, on a drizzling day in the middle of November, Andy Bisset the roadman came home in the early afternoon and told Mary that he had "raxed his back," his wife was not unduly alarmed. With becoming solicitude she made him change his wet clothing for his Sunday best, and let him sit with his feet on the fender, right in the way of her baking, without finding fault with him; and she gave him a freshly baked scone for his tea. But she began to grow anxious when, with the passage of the hours, Andy's complaints became more and more ill-tempered.

"The sma' o' my back's in a reid-hot vice," he growled, "I can neither budge nor bend. I'm sufferin' awfu'."

Mary listened anxiously and, early in the evening, borrowed a "rubbin' bottle" from Tibbie Craig next door. It had wrought marvels when Tibbie had sprained her ankle four years before—but the contents of a "rubbin' bottle" would not seem, like good wine, to improve with age, and the liniment failed to ease him.

So his wife made him lie across the bed,

which he did with much groaning and agonised contortions of his face, and, laying a fold of old blanket over his loins, she "airned his back" with a flat iron. The iron was so hot that it charred the surface of the blanket; but Andy would not admit that he derived the least benefit from it.

In despair Mary called Tibbie into consultation. Having buried her own man eighteen months before, she was an indubitable authority on the treatment of sick husbands.

She came in, heavy-footed, big-breasted, fat of face, and studied Andy's naked torso as he lay prone across the bed. He had screwed his neck round so that his right cheek was in contact with the bed-cover and he could look over his left shoulder.

Tibbie put a heavy thumb upon him in the region of his twelfth rib.

Andy howled. She jabbed her thumb into his back again two inches lower down. Andy yelled more loudly still, and Tibbie went over to the hearth-stone—her diagnosis completed: her line of treatment mapped out.

"What's wrang wi' him, Tib, dae ye think?" asked Mary, fear in her voice.

"Inflammation of coorse! Onybody could tell that."

Andy groaned piteously.

"Is it smittle, Tib?"

"No, Mary! but it's gey kittle. Hoo auld is he?"

"Hoo auld are ye, Andy?" asked Mary, who had forgotten.

"Forty come Ne'er's day," and Andy groaned again.

"It's a bad age for a man," said Tib, shaking her head ominously, and, without dropping her voice she continued: "John first took bad aboot that time o' life, an' he deed o' inflammation in the en' tae."

Andy's face went ashen. He emitted a strange noise that was half moan, half whine.

"But ye dinna think he's deein', dae ye, Tib? He was as strong as a horse when he went oot the day," sobbed Mary timorously.

"That's the kin' that aye dees sudden," said Tib with conviction.

By this time the wretched Andy was in a cold perspiration. He was shaking all over. His teeth chattered; his groans were awe-inspiring.

"What am I tae dae, Tib?" cried Mary, clasping and unclasping her hands nervously.

"Hae ye a reid flannel petticoat?" asked Tibbie.

Her answer was smothered by a groan from Andy. "I'm far owre bad for reid flannel tae cure me. I'm deein', Mary. For Guidsake sen' for the doctor ere it's owre late."

An hour elapsed before the hastily summoned doctor arrived. Before he came a bag of hot salt, wrapped in Mary's "reid flannel petticoat," had been applied to Andy's back without avail.

It made him worse, he said: whereat Tibbie

nodded her head sagely and muttered : " That's whit puir John said the nicht he slipped awa'." Then an inspiration came to her, and she sent one of Andy's children off at a race to the smiddy.

" Rin an' ask Sam'l Delap for the len' o' his hartshorn an' ile. Say yer faither's fell bad wi' inflammation, and Tibbie Craig wants tae rub him."

In a few minutes the boy was back again with the precious bottle.

Tibbie, sitting on the edge of the bed, poured a stream of the liniment on the sufferer's back and began to rub it in with the flat of a horny hand. Andy thought he was being scraped with a file. As she rubbed she offered the consolations of her experience to the distracted Mary, who was wearing herself out by running to and from the door in her futile desire to hasten the coming of the doctor.

" If the inflammation doesna lift afore the turn o' the nicht I'm thinkin' it'll gang badly wi' him."

Mary bit her lip to check a rising sob. Tibbie continued industriously to apply the sand-paper of her hand to Andy's back and the torture of her doleful tongue to his spirit.

" Did ye bury the bairn i' Dalbean Kirkyard or at Whinburn ? It'll be a lang traik tae Whinburn on a winter's day."

Mary sat down with a flop in a chair by the fire and began to cry.

The worm that was Andy turned. There was venom on his tongue.

"For Guidsake, wumman, shut yer nesty mooth! Ye croak like an auld hoodie craw. An' let my back alane. Yer hand's like a curry-kaim."

At this very moment the doctor entered close on the heels of the sharp rap he had given on the door.

Mary sprang up and wiped her eyes. Tibbie rose from the bed, and wiped her hands on her apron. "I've juist been rubbin' him, doctor, wi' hartshorn and ile. I'm thinkin' he's got inflammation, an' I'm feared it's strikin' up tae his brain. By whit he's been sayin' I jaloose he's a'ready queer i' the heid," and she cast a vindictive glance into Andy's left eye.

As he stooped to examine his patient the doctor fancied he heard him swear fervently.

With many groans Andy indicated the site of his greatest pain. The doctor laid deft and gentle fingers upon it, questioning Andy as he did so. Then he tapped him briskly all along the protuberant bosses of his spine, Andy answering that the percussion did not hurt him. The doctor spread both his hands flat on the back of Andy's chest.

"Take a long breath," he said; and Andy breathed deeply, and groaned more deeply still.

"Where did it hurt?" asked the doctor.

Andy placed his hand over the muscles in the small of his back.

"I see!" said the doctor.

He applied the stethoscope over the back of the lungs.

Tibbie, standing in front of the fire with her hands on her large hips, nudged Mary with her elbow.

"He's tryin' him wi' his wee trumpet," she said; "it's a bad sign."

The doctor raised his head. "Do you think you can stand up?" he asked, and placing an arm under Andy's chest, he helped him to his feet. There was a heavy perspiration on Andy's brow; his face was ashen grey; the effort had apparently caused him great pain.

The doctor steadied him gently.

"Now bend forward a little," he said.

Andy did so—and groaned.

"Now straighten yourself up again," said the doctor.

Andy did so—and yelled. "It grups me there, doctor!" and he placed his hand in the small of his back again.

"I see!" said the doctor. "Mrs. Bisset, let your man sit in a chair by the fire, and wrap him well up with blankets. If you'll send down to my house in half an hour I'll have some medicine and a 'rubbing bottle' ready for him."

"Thank ye, Doctor!" said Mary, a look of relief beginning to break on her anxious face.

"Is there a name for Andy's complaint, sir?"

"Yes," answered the doctor. "He has lumbago."

"Then it's no' inflammation," cried Mary, looking triumphantly at Tibbie.

"Oh yes! It's inflammation right enough," answered the doctor.

"What did I tell ye?" asked Tibbie, exultation in her voice. "Did I dae richt, doctor?" she asked, "tae rub him wi' hartshorn an' ile."

"Certainly, Mrs. Craig; it was excellent treatment."

"I thocht sae," muttered the triumphant Tibbie.

Andy made his voice heard through the folds of the blanket in which his solicitous wife had already wrapped his back and smothered his head.

"Wull it kill me?" he groaned.

"Not a bit of it, Andy! You'll be perfectly well in a week or ten days," said the doctor cheerily, as he got into his heavy frieze coat with the fussy help of Mrs. Craig.

"That's a mercy!" exclaimed Mary fervently.

After the doctor had gone there was silence for a moment. Then Mary raked the ashes through the lower bars of the grate, and heaped on fresh coal. Tibbie looked at the clock, then turned to Andy:

"I hope, Andy Bisset, ye'll tak' back yer impident words. Me a hoodie craw! Me wi' a haun' like a curry-kaim! I was richt aboot inflammation! I was richt aboot rubbin' ye."

"Ach! haud yer tongue, wumman!" groaned the exasperated Andy. "Ye were wrang aboot deein'! I'm no gaun tae dee! the doctor said it."

“ Weel ! ” retorted Tibbie angrily, “ if ye’ve nae mainners I’m no’ stoppin’ ; an’ if ye dinna dee o’t, ye’ll dee efter it, so there ! ” with which accurate and unexpected Parthian shaft she banged the door from the outside.

They misjudge Tibbie, and all of her ilk, who imagine that such a passage of arms means necessarily a rupture of all neighbourly relations. If Tibbie had a “ nesty tongue ” she had also a forgiving spirit, and that useful quality of mind which enables a person, in retrospect, to attribute to the other party to a quarrel any malevolence or bitterness displayed in its progress. This is a great gift not limited to any class. Tibbie forgave Andy, as she completed her toilet next morning, her fat bare arms, bent sharply at the elbows, showing like huge triangles in her glass, as, with hairpins in mouth, she dressed her hair. “ Efter a’ ”—she said through the hedge of hairpins—“ he’s only a man : an’ ane maun mak’ allooances for the puir feckless things.”

Her kindness of heart did not end with the free pardon she registered in her mind, for she showed a nice solicitude by “ chappin’ at the door ” before ten o’clock, and without waiting to be invited, she lifted the latch and walked in. As an earnest of her forgiveness she took Andy a bowl of mutton broth.

Andy still sat by the fire. Even in health he was not comely ; his skin was mud-coloured and greasy, his eyes, below his hairless eyebrows,

were watery, his nose was uncouth, and his mouth was wide like a frog's; but after a sleepless night, with chin grey and unshaven, with sunken cheeks, and rusty hair awry, he looked a pitiable object.

Tibbie surveyed him critically. He looked up at her great bulk. There was a challenge in his eyes which died suddenly before the mild benevolence that beamed from hers. Also the broth smelled good.

"Mary," she said, "I hope puir Andy has had a guid nicht."

"He hasna as muckle as closed an e'e," said Mary wearily.

"An' hae ye gi'en him the doctor's bottle?" asked Tibbie.

"I've ta'en it reg'lar," answered Andy, "an' Mary has rubbed ma back three times, but I'm nae better."

"That's bad!" said Tibbie sympathetically. "You try this broth an' when ye've finished it I'll rub yer back for ye. I'll pit it richt."

"Thenk ye!" said Andy. "Ye're rale neebourly, Tibbie."

When Andy had emptied the bowl, which he did with relish, Tibbie set to work on his back. Her manipulations set him to groaning again—but in between the groans he talked:

"I'm no' sure that the doctor unnerstaun's my case. He's gettin' auld."

"I've aye thoct he was mista'en aboot Craig!" said Tibbie.

"Dae ye think it micht be graivel or the kidneys?" asked Andy gloomily.

"As like as no'; or maybe ye've raxed the spine o' yer back," answered Tibbie, arresting with her great squat thumb a trickle of oil that was sliding obliquely over Andy's right flank.

"That's what I thoct masel'," answered Andy, "an' I've heard tell that the spine o' the back gi'es ye paralysis."

"Like the young man i' the Buik!" said Tibbie, who did not attend the kirk often, but who thought to add to her remedial activities the consolations of religion.

"He was never as bad as me," said Andy. "It doesna say he raxed his back."

In spite of the doctor's cheery prognosis, Andy was not better in ten days. At the end of that time he was very much worse. His pain had abated, but an incautious touch upon the back, an unwise movement on his own part, or a blast of wind through the door would extract from Andy's lips a sudden cry of agony.

With the help of two sticks he could shuffle, like a bowed and decrepit old man, across the floor; but he could not lift his feet clear of the ground, but trailed them painfully.

The doctor was puzzled: and said so.

Sam'l Delap, the smith, big and hearty, dropped in of an evening and boomed words of counsel in his reverberating voice.

"Ye want some horse-liniment, Andy! If I

had ye doon at the smiddy I could cure ye." He spoke more truly than he knew.

Willie Shed watched Andy trail across the floor. As he gazed he looked exactly like a ferret watching a crippled rabbit. He looked at his own "contrackit leader" and suggested—"broon paper soaked in whisky and sprinkled wi' cayenne pepper," and if that failed "some ile frae Sam'l Delap's pourie."

Andy tried these, and many other remedies, but without avail. Then the doctor insisted, after a very thorough examination, that Andy must force himself to take a daily walk out-of-doors. "Ye'll manage fine, if you set your mind to it," he urged; and Tibbie confessed to Mary, after he had departed, that "she never kent the doctor sae herless before."

So next day Andy ventured forth, in the sunny part of the day. He leaned upon two sticks, and the faithful Mary accompanied him, lending him, from time to time, the support of her arm.

To Dalbean, which had known Andy as a hale man, with a slow but steady gait, his appearance was pathetic and surprising. Before taking a step he planted his two sticks widely apart, and leaned forward upon them. Then he turned his head to one side—Tibbie Craig remembered that his head had been to one side when she first saw him lying across the bed the night he took ill—and as though it were on a steel spring, jerked it spasmodically three or four times. After this ritual he swung one foot ponderously

up and, after a hesitating gyration, brought it down with a stamp on the ground. The other foot performed in like fashion, and Andy's progress, though slow and laborious, was a thing to remember. He was an object of lively interest to the boys, and of warm pity to their elders.

"It's a hert-break tae see him," said Jamie Kerr, looking down at his own long but steady legs; and he voiced the heart of Dalbean.

His first walk took him the length of the smiddy, where he rested beside the furnace and gave the smith a long and minute account of his symptoms, to which Sam'l listened closely, his massive head tilted a little to one side.

"I'm sure the doctor was wrang," ended Andy; "it maun be the spine o' ma back."

"It looks like it," answered Sam'l meditatively.

An hour later the smith picked Andy up in his great arms with as much ease as though he had been a bairn and, placing him on a sack in a wheel-barrow, trundled him home. Mary walked alongside, carrying Andy's two sticks. Arrived at Andy's cottage the smith picked him up and carried him within. As he set him down in his chair by the fire, Sam'l chuckled, and in vibrating tones boomed:

"Ye're ane o' the cairrage gentry noo, Andy, wi' a fitman tae boot."

Andy smiled acidly:

"Aye! but I'd rayther hae a new spine tae ma back."

Andy's journey to the smiddy became a daily pilgrimage. There he got the news; there he saw new but old faces daily; there he had an interested audience for the tale of his sufferings. He was never tired of recounting these—he said it helped him to talk about them, and he developed no mean gift of pictorial speech in dwelling upon them. Suggestions rained down upon him like autumn leaves. This one or that one knew a similar case that had been helped by one remedy or another. Andy listened, and undertook to try the various and variegated remedies, the ingredients of which their sponsors usually promised as a free gift. But he never added what is an essential ingredient of all successful remedies, to wit ten drops of faith, for, after listening to the story of some remarkable cure, he would say:

“He canna hae been half as bad as me! It's the spine o' ma back.”

The sponsor of the remedy would protest:

“But he was bed-fast for six months, an' efter takin' a pint o't he could dance the Hielan' fling.”

Whereat Andy would shake his head dubiously, and producing a dirty piece of paper from his pocket—on which he had set down all the symptoms which his remarkably retentive memory sometimes let slip—he would ask:

“Did his richt big tae gi'e a jump, juist as he was settlin' doon tae sleep?” or “Did his parritch stick in his throat if he didna sup it wi' his left haun'?”

" I'll ask him ! I dinna ken ! " would be the answer, on which Andy would put the paper back in his pocket and say dolefully :

" I'll gi'e it a try. But I'm no very hopefu'. Ye see it's the spine o' ma back, an' the doctor made licht o't at the first."

Now it is impossible to feed four hungry children and a sick man on air. With characteristic kindness Andy's friends and neighbours vied with each other in plenishing his table from their gardens and their hen-houses, for in spite of the occasional tartness of its tongue and the bitterness of its criticisms the heart of Dalbean is a warm heart. But an hour came when Mary, looking with dim eyes at the few coins left in the stocking which through so many scanty years she had tried to fill against that rainy day which had now come as a deluge, recognised that ruin threatened her home unless she could avert it. She put the stocking with the coins back into the drawer, and, throwing herself down on the bed, cried a little. Then she rose, and, drying her eyes, looked at herself in the glass. With quick brush Memory painted a picture, and she saw herself as she had been twelve years before on her wedding day—a round-faced, rosy, happy lass, with a light in her eyes, her hair a cascade of reddish gold pouring down on her plump shoulders. A tear wiped out the picture, and she saw herself as she was—with face a little haggard, her cheek bones stretching her sallow skin, her eyes heavy and

lifeless, a thread of not infrequent grey running ominously among the hair that had lost its remembered sheen. Five children, quick on each other's heels, one of whom—"pair wee Elspeth, the floo'er o' the flock"—lay in the kirkyard, and a dozen years of plucky but constant struggle, had taken their toll of her; and there was that wearisome, gnawing pain that had begun to torment her breast. She was ten years older than her years. But the path of duty lay straight before her—it was not for her to refuse to walk in it. So that evening she went up to Harleyknowe and told her story to Alan Blair and his wife. They knew of Andy's illness: indeed Alan himself, in the smiddy, had suggested a remedy which Andy had tried without benefit, and though, at the moment, no extra help was needed, they agreed to take her on. She could milk; she could work in the fields; she could do anything, so long as she could keep the wolf from her own door.

When she told Andy what she had done he chided her:

"Wha's gaun tae look efter me?" he asked selfishly, and Mary, through her tears, promised that he would not suffer. She would see to his food before she left in the morning, and when she came home at night she would take him for his daily walk—but there were the bairns to think of as well as her man, and hungry mouths cannot be filled without money.

Andy jerked his head spasmodically, and spoke bitterly :

"I dinna haud wi't," he said, and thereby added to the burden which the brave little woman was shouldering.

Left to himself Andy took to attempting a walk with no assistance save that of his sticks, and succeeded in reaching the smiddy. There, after retailing his old symptoms, and one or two new ones which the shock of Mary's conduct had begotten, he fell to pouring out his soul to the smith.

"An' as though I hadna eneuch tae bear, Mary's left me."

"She hasna rin awa'?" asked the startled Sam'l.

"No! it's no' as bad as that—but she's ta'en work at Harleyknowe."

"She's a plucky wumman!" answered the smith admiringly.

"Aye! but a wumman's first duty is tae her man, mair especially if he's seeck like me."

The smith swung his great hammer to let off steam, and a cascade of sparks leaped from the glowing iron on the anvil. He looked viciously at Andy.

"Man!" he roared, "I'm ashamed tae hear ye speak. Yer tongue should rot in yer mooth afore ye say ocht but guid o' a wumman like that. She's workin' for ye an' the bairns."

Next day, Andy did not visit the smiddy. He went farther afield and, an object of great

pity, he staggered with spasmodic jerkings of the head and acrobatic gait as far as the Blue Bell.

There he had a fit in the street. Willie Shed rushed out of his yard and, bending over him, loosened his collar. Davie Peacock, the innkeeper, hurried forward with a glass in his hand. Andy's contortions ceased; he opened his eyes, and drank the jorum of neat whisky slowly, with hesitating but successful gulps.

"Are ye better noo?" asked Willie, anxiety in his red-rimmed eyes.

Andy groaned.

"I've come tae; but I've nae poo'er i' ma legs. I kent it was the spine o' ma back. I'm paralysed!"

And so it seemed, for when raised to his feet by the innkeeper, Willie Shed, and others who hastened to lend eager but incompetent aid, Andy could not stand. His knees gave way beneath him like the joints of a flail, and he would have fallen had not steady arms supported him.

He was carried home on a hurdle and put to bed, and Mary was summoned, tearful, from her work.

For three weeks Andy lay in bed. During that time he was seen frequently by the doctor, who brought with him one day (as an act of charity on the part of the great man) the Professor who had come to see the minister. When he had examined him carefully he asked Mary

to leave the room for a moment, and she sought shelter in Tibbie Craig's cottage next door. Through the wall, to which Tibbie had applied an inquisitive ear, there came the sound of a stern voice addressing Andy vigorously in broad and burring Scotch, but what, precisely, the voice said Tibbie was unable to discern. When the anxious Mary returned the Professor patted her encouragingly on the shoulder, and assured her, in answer to her trembling question, that Andy was in no danger. Then, turning to the sufferer, who was groaning mournfully, he shook his finger at him and said—"Now don't forget what I have told you!"

When the doctor and the Professor had departed, Andy stopped his groaning and asked petulantly :

"Did he tell ye ocht?"

"Nae mair than ye heard," she answered.

"Weel, they're baith wrang. They're as thick as thieves, an' they dinna unnerstaun' ma case ava'. It's the spine o' ma back—I'll never walk again!"

Mary sat down hopelessly by the fire and wept quietly. Then she picked up one of the children's stockings and resumed her darning, though she could hardly see through her tears.

A week later, Sam'l Delap trundled up to the door a wheeled chair, the joint work of Ezra Snubb the wright, and himself. They were proud of their handiwork, and, with neighbourly kindness, they offered it to Andy. He was as

pleased with it as a child with a new toy, and would not rest till the smith had lifted him into it and wheeled him up and down the kitchen floor.

“As ye haena lost the poo’er o’ yer airms, Andy,” he said, “ye’ll be able tae hurl yersel’,” and he showed him how to propel it.

So Andy began to appear in the village again, and Mary returned to her work at Harleyknowe. Hers was by far the harder burden, though she never complained, for besides the care of her sick husband and her work on the farm she had much to do, and long after all the other lights in Dalbean were extinguished—save that in the Manse window where the minister lay dying—Mary’s lamp still burned. For there were bairns’ clothes to make and mend, and bairns’ stockings to darn, and it was a wan and weary little woman who crept to bed long after Andy was asleep.

Andy wheeled himself out for the air every day, wet or fine. If it rained he took shelter in the smiddy, where there was always a warm corner for him by the fire—and often a bowl of hot broth brought in by Aggie, the smith’s wife. If the day were fine he would trundle his chair further afield, stopping in the village street for a crack with this and that acquaintance, to whom he never tired of repeating the oft-told tale of his sufferings. He always ended on the same note :

“I tell ye, the doctor, an’ the Professor tae,

dinna unnerstaun' ma case. The doctor made licht o't in the beginnin', an' look at me noo: it's the spine o' ma back." And the angles of his big mouth would droop lugubriously, so that he looked more like a frog than ever.

A year passed by, and still Andy showed no signs of improvement. Though he continued to reiterate his woes to everyone who would lend him an ear he professed at last to have grown resigned to his fate, for now, to his criticism of the doctor and the Professor, he always added the words—"It's hard! but it's the wull o' the Almighty, an' I maun juist boo." In this admission Peter Strang detected signs of a sound belief in the doctrine of Predestination, and invited Andy to join the Cameronians. To which Andy answered, "I'm no' ane tae change either ma politics or ma religion—the auld Kirk's guid eneuch for me," adding inconsequentially, "it's the spine o' ma back."

All through the weary months Mary continued to slave—denying herself in a hundred ways that her husband might be denied nothing. She even found money to keep him in "Bogie roll," which Andy accepted as his right, and without thanks, for, like some other invalids, he had grown daily more expectant, daily more selfish. The learned would have said of him that he was ego-centric. Willie Shed put it pithily in words that Dalbean could understand:

"Ye micht think that the centre of gravity o' the universe was the spine of Andy's back."

On a snell, damp February evening, when the sky was streaked with the tatters of wind-torn clouds, the smith was making his way home in the gloaming. He had been up at Acre-end repairing the mill, and, as he strode along, massive and cheerful, he was thinking of the surprise he had in store for Jamie, for whom he had secured a post in an engineering shop in Glasgow. "He's a smert lad! he'll dae fine," he thought, and he laughed quietly as he remembered Jamie's first salmon.

Suddenly he stopped, arrested by a sound unfamiliar in such a place. He listened and the sound came again, and, hurrying forward, he found a woman clinging with both hands to the top bar of a gate by the roadside, and moaning wearily. The sound of his coming startled the woman, for she loosened her grip of the bar and would have fallen had not he seized her.

In the faint light he recognised the worn face of Mary Bisset.

"What ails ye, Mary, lass?" he asked tenderly, but Mary did not answer, but sank down heavily into his arms. Her face was a ghastly white: her breathing was scarcely audible as he lowered her gently to the ground. Quickly he pulled off his jacket and pillowed her head upon it, then he knelt beside her anxiously and struck a match. In its wan light the pallor of death seemed to have touched her, but in a moment she opened her eyes, and looked at the big, kindly face bent over her.

"What's come owre me?" she asked in a weak voice.

"I think ye fainted; are ye better noo?"

"I'll be a' richt in a meenute, Sam'l," she said, for she knew the booming voice. "I'll juist lie quate for a wee."

But it was several minutes before she was able to rise, and even then she would have fallen again had not the smith's big arms held her.

For a moment Sam'l stood perplexed. He freed one hand, and scratched his chin with his thumb, then he picked Mary up like a child and seated her on the grass beside the gate-post.

"Haud on a meenute," he said, "till I get intae my jaicket," and when he had put it on he picked Mary up once more and began to carry her along the road. Though a woman, she was a light burden. Frail and chilled, the warmth of the kindly arms about her, and of the big body against which she found herself pressed, stole into her and rekindled her flickering vitality. She found voice to protest:

"Ye mauna cairry me, Sam'l! I can walk fine."

The smith made no answer.

"Ye maun set me doon, Sam'l, please!" she urged. "It's no seemly, an' fowk nicht talk."

"There's nane tae see," boomed Sam'l. "An' if there were an' they thocht ony ill I'd lay their heids open wi' a cauld chisel:" and the smith strode on.

Mary lay still and silent after that till the

lights of Dalbean came in sight. Then she demanded to be set down with such firmness that the smith yielded. He insisted, however, on supporting her with his arm, and as she walked slowly, leaning heavily upon him, she talked in a slack and weary voice.

"Ye'll no' say a word o' this tae pair Andy?" she pleaded.

"Hae ye ever been ta'en like this afore?" asked the smith.

"Aye! mair than aince," she answered, "but never quite as bad. I'm a dune wumman." And she sobbed.

"Are ye gettin' eneuch tae eat?" asked Sam'l, his shrewd sense prompting him.

"A' I can manage," she answered, lying bravely, "but there's the bairns tae feed, an' Andy."

"An' ye're workin' like a slave!" growled the smith.

"There's nae slavery where love is," she said softly, and Sam'l, smitten sorely in the heart, swallowed quickly to keep down a lump that rose suddenly in his throat. He thought of Andy; saw his muddy face with the hairless eyebrows, and the wide weak mouth; heard his querulous voice repeating the tale of his woes.

"Is he ill tae leeve wi'?" he asked suddenly.

Mary stopped abruptly and tried to free herself from the smith's supporting arm.

"Ye've nae richt tae ask that, Sam'l," she

said hotly. "He's my man, an' he's sair stricken."

"I meant nae hairm," answered the smith gently; but he knew that Mary's words were a fence thrown up by her love to protect her man from scorn.

When they came to the smiddy Sam'l would take no refusal, but insisted that Mary must come into the house.

He handed her over to Aggie, who set her in a chair by the blazing fire, and then, beckoning his wife into the back-kitchen, he whispered a word or two in her ear, and went out hastily to the smiddy. When he came back again an hour later, Mary had gone home, warmed, fed, and comforted.

Over his pipe, after his own supper, he told Aggie what had happened.

"She's a plucky wee woman," he boomed. "Andy's no fit tae clean her shoon."

Now it may have been chance, or it may have been, as Peter Strang would have insisted, Predestination that caused Andy to trundle himself into the smiddy next morning, which was Saturday. And it may have been Predestination again which ruled that when he came the smith should be shoeing a somewhat restless horse.

Andy trundled his chair to its accustomed place by the fire, and sat there enjoying the warmth. He took out his pipe and proceeded to fill it, for he always had his fresh supply of "Bogie roll" on Saturday. When his pipe was filled

he took out his box of matches, but, by some mischance—or was it Predestination again?—the box slipped from his fingers and rolled about a foot away from his chair. Now the horse was facing Andy some yards away, and the boy who had brought it was standing with his back to Andy stroking its head and whispering comforting words to keep it quiet. The smith had taken a red-hot shoe from the furnace, and, with his back to Andy, had pulled up one of the animal's fore-legs and held it between his knees as he stooped and applied the hot shoe to the hoof. His head was down, intent on his work, and his back was towards Andy; but, as he turned his face a little to one side to avoid the acrid smoke of the charred hoof, he caught a glimpse of Andy in the distance framed between the horse's legs. And he saw Andy's feet, that for more than a year had been paralysed, move. First one, then another, was lifted from the little foot-piece on which they rested, and with a quick thrust was pushed forward to draw the match-box nearer the chair; then Andy stooped and picked it up. The smith was so thunder-struck that for a moment he forgot what he was doing, and held the hot shoe an instant too long in place, so that the horse jerked away its leg violently and reared, to the imminent danger of the smith and the boy, who had a hard task to soothe it.

When the horse was quiet again, the smith resumed his task—but his teeth were set

viciously, and there was a grim look in his eyes. He was thinking hard, and if Andy could have read his thoughts his frog-like mouth would not have smiled so complacently when the boy and the horse had gone.

"Yours is kittle wark, Sam'l," he said. "It tak's a nerve."

"Aye!" said the smith laconically; still in a maze of thought.

Andy smoked silently for a moment. The smith, raking coals over the fire, was glowering at him savagely. He was comparing his well-fed sleekness with the frail thin body of the woman he had carried so easily a night ago, and his blood boiled.

Andy, self-centred, noticed nothing. "Wull ye len' me a poun', Sam'l?" he said.

"What for?" asked the smith, surprise and anger in his tone.

"Wullie Shed lent me a poun' a month back; I sent it tae the Hindu Healer, the man that advertises in the *Whinburn Gazette*, for a bottle o' his Herbal Electricity. I wanted tae try it."

"Did it dae ye ony guid?"

"No! an' I've writ an' telt him; an' he says that if I'll send him anither poun' he'll sen' me a stronger bottle, for he's made a special study o' my case, an' he agrees that the doctors dinna unnerstaun' it. He says he's made a great discovery."

"Nae doot!" growled Sam'l. "Dae ye ken whit his discovery is?"

"Hoo should I ken?" asked Andy.

"Weel, I'll tell ye. His great discovery is that there's mair fules than wyse folk. But Sam'l Dunlop's no' ane o' them. So there, Andy! Ye'd better be wheelin' yersel' awa' hame, Andy, or we'll be quarrellin'." And the smith's jaws snapped like a terrier's.

"I didna think ye'd tak' a sma' request sae unkindly, Sam'l," said Andy, as he began to trundle his chair to the door.

"It's no' that—awa' hame wi' ye," he answered angrily.

All afternoon, and for an hour before he fell asleep, the smith thought of the discovery he had made. Andy was shamming—the black-guard could move his legs, his paralysis was a lie. He was living a life of ease, the centre of warm pity, while his poor wife—and the smith clenched his hands so vehemently that it was well for Andy his throat was not in their grip. But what to do Sam'l could not decide.

Light came to him quite suddenly in the kirk next day just at the end of the long second prayer. The minister had got the length of that weekly petition in which he asked that all the blessings which he had omitted to mention might be bestowed abundantly on the congregation. As it had taken him ten minutes to catalogue those he remembered there could not be many more even for the most expectant, thought the smith; and then as though in answer to the all-embracing petition, inspiration descended on him. It came

so suddenly that he laughed—to the horror of Aggie, who kicked him viciously on the back of the leg. But in spite of this wifely remonstrance her horrified eyes more than once caught an unholy smile on his face during the sermon.

On the way home she taxed him with his unseemly levity, but Sam'l only grinned broadly and said nothing.

Next morning he was up betimes and at work in the smiddy, when, a little before noon, Andy trundled himself in.

"The very man I want tae see," exclaimed Sam'l beamingly, and Andy, looking at his cheerful face, took courage and asked again for the loan of a pound.

"Let the Hindu Healer gang tae Freuchie, Andy! He's robbin' ye. I've got a new remedy for ye—better than his Herbal Electricity, I'll warrant."

"What is it?" asked Andy eagerly.

"It's something for the spine o' the back!" answered the smith. "I'm owre busy tae try it noo, but if ye'll come back aboot five o'clock whan the wark's feenished, I'll apply it mase'."

"Thank ye!" said Andy. "Ye've been a guid frien' tae me."

"Aye!—an' I'll be a better," said Sam'l meaningly as Andy wheeled himself out.

When Andy came back at five o'clock the first thing the smith did was to close the door, and hammer a nail into it just above the latch, so that it could not be opened from the outside.

"What's that for?" asked Andy wonderingly.

"Weel! I want yer back stripped; an' I thocht ye'd like a bit o' privacy. We dinna want ony keekin' weans or women about."

"That's very considerate!" said Andy unsuspiciously.

The smith lifted Andy from his chair and set him on a three-legged stool. "I'll be able tae get at yer back better here," he said in explanation.

Then, with Sam's assistance, Andy stripped himself to the waist, and sat with his naked back to the furnace. The smith went to the bench and picked up the oil "pourie"—"Juist haud this a meenite," he said. "Willie Shed has great faith in my ile."

"So I've heard," said Andy; "but it's no' the spine o' his back."

"Weel, juist rub some intae yer haun's, in the meantime. It's pairt o' the treatment."

Andy did so, while the smith seized the lever of the bellows and, working strenuously, made the furnace roar. "I'm juist warmin' the liniment," he said.

The unsuspecting Andy set the pourie down, and rubbed his oily palms together.

Suddenly the smith seized his pincers and, taking a bar of iron, almost white hot, from the furnace, sprang at Andy.

"This wull cure the spine o' yer back, ma lad," he roared, as he brandished the glowing mass before Andy's horrified eyes.

"Ye're no gaun tae touch me wi' that!" yelled the frightened Andy.

"I am!" bellowed the smith, and, seizing Andy by the hair, he bent him suddenly forward, and touched him with the red-hot bar right over the back-bone.

Andy shrieked, and sprang to his feet. The smith roared with laughter.

"Ye blasted hypocrite! Walk, I tell ye!" and the red-hot bar came close to Andy's back once more.

But it did not touch him; for Andy leaped away and, in a shambling run, tried to escape. But the smith, anger in his eyes, and a scourge in his voice, was close on his heels, the glowing bar an inch from his skin. Andy ran faster: the smith pursued him relentlessly. Round and round the smiddy they went, Andy gasping, in a sweat of fear. "Aince roon' again, an' owre the anvil juist tae complete the cure!" thundered the smith, and the horrified Andy, in terror of further torture, took a run and cleared it.

The smith threw the bar into the cooling trough, and, placing his great hands on his sides, doubled up in a spasm of laughter.

"That's better than the Hindu Healer!" he roared, "and costs less money," and he laughed again.

Andy stood trembling—exhausted, afraid.

"Rub yer greasy hauns on yer back," ye dirty, selfish deevil," bellowed the smith, "it'll ease the smert. Ye're mair frichted than hurt."

Andy whimpered, but did as the smith had bidden.

“Noo pit on yer claes, ye meeserable hound !” cried Sam’l, as he seized a hammer and proceeded to knock the wheels off Andy’s chair. “Ye’ll need this nae mair,” he said.

When Andy was dressed, the smith removed the nail from the door and threw it open.

“Awa’ hame wi’ ye, ye snivellin’ coward !” he cried, “an’ get back tae yer wark as sune as ye can ; an’ if there’s ony mair o’ yer damned shamming, I’ll drag ye here by the hair o’ the heid an’ brand ye tae the bane.”

XIII

KIRSTY LEARMONT

IF you had met Kirsty Learmont on the road you would probably not have given her a second thought. A flower battered by the wind and rain soon loses its loveliness. So it was with Kirsty's face. All the beauty that had clothed it when she was a girl had been beaten out of it by years of exposure to the blaze of the sun in summer, the sting of the thrashing rain and the snell, harsh winds of winter. Her weather-worn face, across which there sometimes blew a wisp of rusty grey hair that had escaped from under her black straw hat, her short, bowed figure bent through long fights with the wind, her rough-shod feet and her drab costume, of coarse tweed, did not make an attractive picture. But, if you had looked a second time, you might, if you were a person of vision, have caught a glimpse of the beauty of her eyes, or noted the kindly curve of her lips. And if you had been privileged to pass behind the bars of her reserve and hold intimate converse with her, you would have found that her soul was a thing of rare beauty, and you would have learned, if you did

not know it already, that an earthenware vessel of very common clay may hold some of the rich wine of heaven.

Kirsty was our post-woman. Her husband had been letter-carrier before her, but six months after they were married he had lost his way in a snow-storm and had fallen exhausted on the moors. When they found him he was dead, and, as an act of grace, his post was offered to his widow. So for twenty-five years Kirsty was a familiar figure in and around Dalbean.

You could see her every morning, wet or fine, leaving the village post-office shortly after the post-gig had driven in from Whinburn. Her rough right hand grasped a strong hazel stick, the brown canvas bag that held the letters was slung over her shoulders, and the cobbles rang to the firm tread of her tackety boots. In virtue of her office as a Government servant she was supposed to wear a belt with an official-looking buckle; but as the years went by she discarded it, though she continued to carry it—with an eye on possible investigations by some prying inspector—in the bottom of the bag below the letters.

“It’s nae use tae me noo,” she said. “I’m a’ ae thickness, an’ I’ve lost ma waist, so it wad be sheer affectation tae wear it.”

She had a long round before her, and she was due back again by four o’clock in the afternoon when the post-gig set out again with its burden

to Whinburn. The farthest point in her range was the farm of Dowhills, seven miles away, and in her daily journey she was the bearer of messages of good or evil, happiness or sorrow, to castle and cot-house, to shop, to manse, or farm. Her district was a scattered one, and much of her daily walk was lonely, or would have been lonely to one with a mind less open than Kirsty's. But she was a lover of Nature, with an eye open to see and read the beauties woven into that fair garment of God. Her ear was alert to catch the wonderful whispers of earth, the chatter of the burn by the roadside, the whisper of the wind among the rushes, the dry tinkle of the withered bluebells by the wayside, the lover's sigh of the parched earth as she throws her arms open to receive the gentle rain. She was in tune with the world around her; a child at heart, with a child's vision and a child's sympathy in the shrunken frame of a weather-beaten woman. The earth with all its changing beauty, the sky in all its moods—with thunder on its dark brow, or laughter in the sun-kissed dimples of its clouds—the song of birds, had all spoken to her soul, and made her what she was. No bird that built its nest along her beat but was her friend, and she would gladly add a mile to her daily journey for weeks at a time sooner than disturb a robin that had built its nest in the letter-box at the end of the farm loaning. She knew and could imitate the calls of all the birds, and sometimes she would boast laughingly of a trick

she had played on an amorous male thrush that she had decoyed into following her, with protesting questioning chirrups as he darted from bush to bush, for more than a mile by mimicking the song of a potential mate.

"It's queer," she said, "but nae male was ever born that wadna follow a wumman that whistled on him. Bird an' man are baith alike; a puff o' win' can bewitch them."

She was an institution in the country-side, and was still, to all outward seeming, fit for many years' work when an inspector descended on Dalbean. He was a new broom, keen for change, and he reported that in his opinion the work that Kirsty was doing was work for a young man, and he recommended her superannuation. We heard nothing of it until the edict had been issued. Had we known we might have raised a clamour of protest, but the walls of Government Departments are not as the walls of Jericho; they do not fall at a shout.

On an afternoon at the end of May Kirsty sat in the kitchen at Dowhills. The good wife of that hospitable farmhouse was busy baking oat-cakes, and Kirsty sat, as she had done many a time before, with her feet on the fender and a cup of tea in her lap. Her stick rested against the jamb of the fireplace, her canvas bag was slung from the back of the chair. Mrs. Cullen had laid a large round oat-cake on the

girdle and with two quick sweeps of her knife had divided it into three.

"Ye'll hae heard, Mrs. Cullen," said Kirsty, "that I'll no' be back the morn?"

Mrs. Cullen, her left hand steadying the girdle, her right hand still holding the knife above the divided oat-cake, started.

"Ye'll no' be back the morn!—whatever for?" she asked.

"I'm superanniated!"

"Whatever's that?" asked Mrs. Cullen in puzzled tones, half fearing that the strange word might denote some new and serious disease. "I hope it's no' something bad."

"Oh aye! it's bad eneuch," answered Kirsty, her voice a little tremulous. "It's a genteel wey o' tellin' me I'm owre auld for ma job."

"But ye're no' a' that auld," said Mrs. Cullen, who was accustomed to see people work to the extreme limits of advanced old age. "An' there hae been nae complaints aboot ye—o' that I'm shure."

"What ye say is true," answered Kirsty. "I could cairry on for mony a year tae come; but they'll no' let me."

"What are ye gaun tae dae?" asked Mrs. Cullen anxiously.

"Oh! it micht be waur. God kens it's bad eneuch, but they've gi'en me a pension."

"It's the very least they daur dae!" said Mrs. Cullen indignantly. "We'll miss ye sairly, Kirsty; naebody will ever fill yer place."

She lengthened by a link the chain from which the girdle hung, and let it drop nearer the fire. If she had looked at Kirsty just then she would have seen her brush her rough sleeve across her eyes, but, when she did look at her, her face was steady again.

“Ye’re awfu’ kind, Mrs. Cullen; yer words are a great help.”

The good housewife returned to her baking-board and, rubbing the rolling-pin with a mealy hand, proceeded to roll out another cake.

For a time Kirsty sat silent with her eyes fixed on the fire; then she began to speak, slowly at first, and with little timid haltings. But as she went on her soul gathered confidence for its unburdening. Mrs. Cullen listened, busy the while between her baking-board and the fire, saying little more than an occasional word.

“Mine has been a happy life,” said Kirsty, “an’ if I had my choice again I’d be a post-woman. It may be a hard job, mair fitted, as the inspector thinks, for a man than for a woman, but it has its compensations. Mony a time I’ve thocht, as I trudged alang wi’ ma bag on ma shouthers, that I was a hand-maiden o’ God. An’ I felt a kin’ o’ pride that I should hae been chosen for sic a task. Here was me, Kirsty Learmont, that nae man but ane ever gi’ed a second thocht tae, cairryin’ messages day by day that micht mak’ or mar, help or hinder, cheer or chasten men an’ women that I hardly kent, an’ some I was never likely tae see. An

mony a time I've looked up at the sky, an' seen the sun there, or the moon an' the stars o' a nicht, an' I've said tae masel'—Kirsty, Him that placed them yonder, set you on the road here. Ye're only a wee bit o' a woman; but ye've got yer ain job—like them. See ye dae it."

She shifted her body a little to give Mrs. Cullen better access to the fire.

"Aye! I maun hae brocht a lot o' sorrow intae fowks' lives, bringing messages o' death an' dule frae them that were far awa', or takin' messages o' the same kin' tae scatter tae the ends o' the earth; but if I've brocht sorrow I've brocht joy as weel."

"Ye hae that," said Mrs. Cullen fervently. "Think o' a' the happy letters ye've brocht me frae ma boy that's awa'"—for every woman views the world from the angle of her own affections.

"An' ae thing I hae learned—an' it's very wunnerfu'—when sorrow comes or joy, gentle and simple are a' alike—ae flesh. The size o' the hoose may differ—the hert's the same: an' cotter's lass or castle leddy are ain sisters when dule touches them or love comes tae them.

"Weel I min', though it's mony a year sin', when Miss Margery at the Castle was courtin'. I had seen a weel-set-up young man in the kirk beside her—an' efter he went awa' I remember whan I took the letters up tae the Castle there was ane for Miss Margery addressed in a strong haun' o' write that wasna a wumman's. I thocht naething o't, but next week Miss Margery

cam' trippin' doon the Avenue tae see me—An' Oh, Kirsty,' says she, as sweet as an angel, 'have you any letters for me?' She said letters, mark ye, but I kent she wanted only ane. So I waled it oot, an' it was in the same strong haun o' write as the ane before. An' I left her wi't, an' on I went tae the Castle, an' whan I cam' doon the Avenue again I saw Miss Margery (she didna see me) kiss her letter and slip it intae her breist. An' whan she passed me there was sic a licht in her e'e, an' she was lilting a sang.

"An' I kent it was love: for mony a time I'd seen a cotter's lass cairry on the same wey—wait for me in the loanin' tae get the letter first—an' read it hungrily as she walked, an' kiss it, an' hide it in her goon. Aye! a lass in love aye hides her first rale love-letter owre her hert. I ken—I did it masel'."

Mrs. Cullen laughed. "I suppose we're a' the same, Kirsty. Mony a letter I've hid there tae—no' the first alane, but ithers as weel, an' I yet can min' the warmth o' them, an' the kindly wee crackle they made when ye moved—whisperin' tae ye like yer lad."

"An' the letters I took back!—they were fu' o' love."

"Hoo dae ye ken that, Kirsty?" asked Mrs. Cullen quickly. "Shurely ye didna open them?"

"No, no! I never opened a letter that wasna my ain—it's agin the law, an' wi' a love-letter

it would hae been waur than wrang. But mony a time I've held Miss Margery's letters, or the letters o' some ither bonnie lass that I kent was in love, tae ma ear, an' I heard the birds singin' in them that tenderly it brocht tears tae ma een. It was aye the skylark I heard in Miss Margery's letters singin' below the sun, but mair often in the letter o' some humbler lass it was the mavis or the lintie—wi' the same love-lilt, but a simpler tune. For the hert o' every lass in love is a nest o' singin' birds. Aye! it's wunnerfu' what ye can hear by haudin' a letter tae yer lug. An' whan I knew that a lass was in love I hae listened tae her lad's letters, as I listened tae hers. An' it's queer—but I never heard a bird sing in a man's letter. If there was ony singin' ava' it was in a man's voice—strong an' confident, but no' often bonnie."

Mrs. Cullen laughed. "Maybe the lass the letter was for liked that best."

"I've been Love's messenger tae mony a man an' maid this score an' mair o' years. I often think o't. They, married happily noo, never think o' the pairt I played in their love makin'. Withoot me as a go-between their love nicht hae cam' tae naething."

Kirsty paused for a long moment, then turned in her chair and threw a question at the bent back of Mrs. Cullen, which straightened it on the instant.

"Hoo mony bairns dae ye think I've got, Mrs. Cullen?"

"Losh! I never kent ye had ony, Kirsty."

"Aye! that's what maist fowk think, an' maybe they peety me—but I've mair bairns than ony ither wumman in Dalbean."

"Ye surprise me!" said the mystified baker, patting the last cake with the flat of her hand.

"It's easy eneuch explained," said Kirsty. "Mony a time I'll stop on the road tae talk tae a bonnie bairn, an' when it has toddled awa' an' left me, I'll say tae masel'—'Kirsty, ye're no' a mither—at least ye dinna get the credit o' bein' ane, but that's ane o' yer ain weans, for ye were the love-link between its faither an' its mither.' An' ma hert'll fill for a meenute an' I'll sometimes slip intae the wood by the roadside an' drap on ma knees an' say a wee prayer for the bairn, as a mither micht. An' maybe the prayer will be answered, an' maybe no'—I canna tell—but it's dune me guid tae hae prayed. Aye! it's guid tae pray for the bairns that I suffered for in the wind an' the rain; though I never bore them in sorrow."

Mrs. Cullen brushed the bake-board quickly with a feather-brush, then tilted the board on the table, so that the last crumbs trickled from it. Kirsty rose and set her empty cup on the edge of the dresser.

"Hae ye ever thocht what a marvellous thing life is?" she asked.

"Sometimes," said Mrs. Cullen; "but it puzzles me, an' nayther the Book nor the cate-

chism nor the meenister can mak' it plain for me."

"It puzzles us a'," said Kirsty. "An' there's muckle o't we'll never unnerstaun' till we can see it, as God sees it, frae the ither side. We maun be content tae wait."

"Kirsty," said Mrs. Cullen, "ye talk like a book o' poetry."

Kirsty laughed.

"Na, na! I'm juist a haverin' superanniated buddy—wi' a lonely life aheid o' her," and she sighed.

"But ye needna be lonely," said Mrs. Cullen, "ye've lots o' frien's up an' doon the countryside, an' they'll a' be gled tae see ye."

"That's as maybe!" said Kirsty sadly, "an' everybody's been awfu' kind, but it will never be the same again."

"What for no?" asked Mrs. Cullen assuringly.

"Weel, ye see it's this wey," said Kirsty. "For five-an'-twenty years everybody along the road has wanted me. They've waited for the sicht o' me comin', or they've listened for my whustle at the bottom o' the loanin'. God made us women tae be loved—but a woman can be content withoot love if she kens somebody wants her, somebody listens for her fit-fa', somebody watches for her comin'. I've had mair than my share, for I've been wanted by a hale countryside for a' these years. But noo, naebody will watch an' wait for me ony mair, an' it's as though a licht in ma hert had been blawn oot."

XIV

THE STORY OF WILLIE SPROULE

I

WILLIE SPROULE was brought up by his aunt. She was a worthy woman, greatly respected in the parish, but she had long ago forgotten what it was to be a child and therefore was unfitted for the duty which fate had thrust upon her. Willie was an orphan. His father had been a marine-engineer, who, when his ship had been held up for three months in a French port, had fallen in love with and married a Frenchwoman. He brought her to Dalbean, to his old home, the little thatched cottage, with the hump on its roof like a dromedary's, at the back of the wynd—now tenanted by his only sister, a woman much older than himself. She received the stranger with qualified approval. The natural fragility of the foreigner commended itself to the Scotswoman, but it was a poor counterpoise to her manifold defects. She confided to her intimates that the Frenchwoman was a “feckless sentimental lass wi’ a temper like gunpowder—either greetin’ or singin’, an’ no’ a fit wife for oor Wuillie. Men are daft,” she said,

“an’ she cast a glamour owre the silly fellow.” This to her neighbours—but she informed God, in case it had escaped His notice, that her sister-in-law was a heathen, for she sang songs on the Sabbath Day, and had boldly affirmed that one religion was as good as another, which of course every good Presbyterian knows is not so. So Agnes Sproule prayed for her brother and his wife. She besought God not to judge her brother hardly because he had married this woman—but she judged him harshly enough herself, and rubbed it into him with the sharp edge of her tongue; and she told God quite definitely that as this Frenchwoman had not been brought up on the catechism, and had no knowledge of sound doctrine nor expressed any desire to be taught it, He need not bother about her, but might, fairly, let her go to the place prepared for her.

When Willie was six months old his father went to sea in a ship which foundered in the Bay of Biscay, with the loss of all hands. Agnes Sproule saw in this a judgment on her brother, and wept accordingly—blaming the widow in her heart. She, poor lonely soul, sickened of a “decline” and died when Willie was just a year old. She had loved her little lad with all the passion of her warm heart, and the night before she breathed her last she took her baby into her wasted arms and kissed him fervently. There was such passion in that kiss that it left a tiny imprint on his memory, even though he

was so young. His mother had no relations—or, if she had, she had said nothing about them. So the child passed into the care of his aunt.

Agnes Sproule had all the virtues of her race and kind. She was hard-working, house-proud, independent, thrifty, punctilious in her church attendance, regular in her reading, night and morning, of her chapter. This she did aloud, with one hand beating the air, what time her small nephew, so soon as he could sit erect, sat stiff and uncomfortable in a high chair opposite to her. He dared not move, but sat rigid, awed by her eye, which darted a look at him every thirty words over the top of the Book. She was kind to the little lad in her own way; but her way was not the way of children. She fed him carefully, sometimes denying herself to do so; she clothed him well, though sometimes too warmly, and she taught him to say his prayers—all of which things are necessary for the physical and moral improvement of the young. But she never put her arms round him and hugged him; never cuddled him against her breast and whispered childish nothings to him. She fed him on sound doctrine, but she starved him of love; and so Willie Sproule's childhood was robbed of what should have been its richest possession. Had anyone ventured to suggest to his aunt that she was denying him the love which should have been his, and for which his little soul cried with a hunger-pain that he did not understand nor could interpret,

she would have denied the charge with anger. "She lo'ed the bairn richt eneuch; but she didna believe in saft weys, like his feckless mither"—so she contented herself with giving the little fellow a peck for a kiss when she blew the candle out by his bedside.

Willie dreaded that peck more than he feared the blowing out of the candle which preceded it, for his aunt had a mole on her chin, and from the mole protruded a hair, which she cut short every Saturday with the scissors, leaving a spike which stabbed Willie's cheek like a needle whenever she made her nightly pretence of kissing him. If she had not blown out the candle first, as though she were ashamed of what she was about to do, she would have seen the child's face shrink in little puckers as her cheek approached his.

To a little child a kiss should mean something soft and sweet and tender, full of warm mothering. To Willie it meant a sharp stab in the dark, and an old woman's heavy breath.

He would listen to the creak of the stairs as his aunt went down, and then he would hide his little head under the blankets, shutting out the mysterious darkness with its dread by a soft, safe darkness of his own creation, and with a heart aching for a mother's arms and with a vague memory of his mother's last kiss, he would fall asleep, sometimes wetting his pillow with lonely tears.

II

At the age of five Willie went to school, thereby entering a new and enchanted world. Here he was in happy contact with other boys and girls, and life suddenly became a jolly thing, full of laughter and fun. Lessons presented no difficulty to him. He had that gift of wonder which opens a gate in the mind for all new impressions, and locks the gate quickly again lest they escape. He forgot nothing. As the dominie said, seeing over his steel-rimmed spectacles the rich fruit fore-tokened by the early promise, "If he's spared that bairn'll be a credit tae Dalbean," and straightway set himself, as none but an old Scots dominie ever did, to bring about the fulfilment of his own prophecy. To him, the boy's mind was a garden to be cultivated sedulously.

And year by year Willie repaid his master's efforts to the full. No other pupil could dislodge him from the top of his class, though he was by many months the youngest in it. He became the dominie's comfort in the hour of his visitation.

Once a year a deputation from the Presbytery put the school through its facings. This was an ordeal for the dominie as well as for his pupils. On the Saturday night before the fateful day the dominie put his tawse in pickle, and on the Monday and Tuesday wielded them mercilessly with a view to quickening the laggard wits of

some of his duller pupils against their examination on Wednesday. On Tuesday night he put them far back in the recesses of his desk, and as he turned the key in the lock he muttered to himself "Thank God! there's Willie Sproule." On Wednesday morning came the ministers—black-coated, a little pompous, awe-inspiring. They led off with Bible knowledge and the catechism. Now the dominie taught the catechism thoroughly—with the aid of his leather strap; but he had views about it that would have shocked the ministers. He once expressed them to Sam'l Delap, who gave them a qualified endorsement.

"Did ye ever think, Sam'l," he said, "why sae mony dominies tak' tae drink, and how sae mony weans brocht up on the catechism never cross the kirk door aince they grow up?"

"Nae doot," answered Sam'l, "it's due tae the de'il an' oreeginal sin."

"Aye, Sam'l! it's due tae the de'il. I've aye thocht that whan the Westminster Divines were at work on the catechism the de'il was there, an' I'm convinced he wasna in the sates reserved for distinguished veeitors, but took an active pairt in the work that was toward. That's why some o' the answers are sic teasers. That's heo teachin' the catechism tae stupid lads drives the dominies tae drink, and the lads oot o' the kirk."

But though he cherished such a view his pupils were never found wanting in knowledge

of their "carritches." Children whose small tongues staggered a little over the bigger words would pour forth weighty theological truths in answer to a question. It was lip-knowledge often, and a feat of memory. If one of the ministers had probed a little deeper and asked what some of the more profound answers meant, he would probably have been met with the timid response—"Please sir, I dinna ken." But no minister ever asked that question, possibly because, if he had put it to himself, he might, if he were honest, have had to make the same admission. Having satisfied itself as to the spiritual conditions and the theological knowledge of the school, the deputation would proceed to embark upon what, for it, were more dangerous waters. One of the ministers would say, "Are you presenting any in Greek, dominie?" and, at a sign from the master, two or three of the older boys would rise in their places. As a rule there was no great competition for the honour of acting as examiner in this subject. The duty was usually delegated by common consent to Mr. Wishart, the minister at Whinburn, who, thirty years previously, had won a prize in the Greek class at the University. He loved to recall that the scales had been turned in his favour because he was the only student who knew the first aorist (Attic form) of the Greek verb "to burn." He invariably concluded a kindly investigation of the school's knowledge of Greek by telling the story with

proud satisfaction. But once, in his absence, the task of examining the Greek class was deputed to Mr. McSwither. He, good man, had forgotten all the Greek he had ever known except Alpha and Omega, which he met with in the Book of the Revelation; but he was reluctant to confess his deficiency before the young of the parish lest they should lose their respect for the ministry. But they saw through him, and rejoiced with unholy though silent glee (for the dominie was glowering at them from the background) when he put a finger on a verse in the Testament, and, fearing to trust himself with the Greek words, said "Begin there—and end there," indicating a line two inches further down the page. But the school shone most brightly in "mental arithmetic." For this the questions were propounded to the school as a whole, the youngest pupil competing with the oldest, and in this exercise, while he was still little more than an infant, Willie Sproule excelled. In vain was that ancient and malodorous herring and a half which cost three-ha'pence dragged across his track. He could tell you how many you could get for elevenpence before you had completed the question: or even for sevenpence ha'penny, which is a much more difficult problem in economics. He had an uncanny gift of rapid calculation, and, quick on the heels of a question, his dark eyes would sparkle and his hand would shoot out to indicate that his answer was ready. And he was never wrong. Indeed, on one

occasion he was right, while the answer that the minister who propounded the question had worked out the night before on paper which he held hidden in his hand was wrong. Whereat there was great though silent jubilation in the heart of the dominie, who, to mark the occasion, took an extra dram that night. Whatever the deficiencies in scholastic attainment of the other pupils, Willie's performances in mental arithmetic were so startlingly brilliant that the rest was forgotten, and the Presbytery retired duly convinced that the education of the youth of the parish was being maintained at a high standard.

Now to be brought into the limelight at such an early age is not good for any boy. It tends to make him a conceited little prig. But Willie was saved from such a fate by the rude discipline of the playground, where he was soundly kicked to keep him humble, and by the stern rules of his aunt. She was out of measure proud of her nephew's scholastic attainments of which the dominie boasted to her, taking three-quarters of the credit to himself; but she "didna haud wi' new-fangled weys, that only spoiled bairns," and she kept Willie humble by means of his old jacket. Every afternoon, when he came home from school, his old jacket awaited him hung over a chair-back near the fire; and his aunt saw that he put it on before he went out to play. His school jacket she brushed carefully and put away in the press in his little room. It was probably a necessary economy: but Willie

began to hate his old jacket with a bitter hatred. It was patched, neatly enough, at the elbows, and the wrists, where they had broken, were bound with black braid ; but he had long since grown out of it ; it would hardly button round him, and the sleeves stopped abruptly half-way between his elbows and his hands. It made him "ken-speckle" among the other boys, who, with the brutality of their kind, often taunted him with it, and the "nesty buddies" at the street corner made a joke of it. A boy of a less sensitive nature would have laughed the taunts aside, but Willie, like many another child of lively brain, was thin-skinned, and the taunts lacerated his soul. Being without imagination, his aunt knew nothing of the pain her inflexible rule was causing the boy, and, to his credit be it said, he never told her. He buried his sorrow in his heart, but it took all the glory out of his success at school, and it made him self-conscious and humble. Once he pleaded with the old woman, pointing out that the jacket was too small for him, and that it would not button round him. But she was adamant. "It's guid stuff," she said ; "I hate waste. There's twa three mair months o' wear in't." And that night, when Willie was in bed, she took the jacket and, ripping up the back seam, stitched in a long triangle of grey flannel which she had cut from a discarded petticoat. It was a clever enough bit of needle-work, but the colours did not match, and the jacket was more "ken-

speckle" than ever. Willie's torment of soul was keener than ever: the taunts of his school-fellows were as arrows barbed.

But the obnoxious garment was the occasion of an incident that long years afterward played a decisive part in his life. He was eleven years old when the event happened; he was thirty-one when it bore fruit.

On a Saturday in early June every year a team came from Whinburn Academy to play a cricket-match with the boys of the school at Dalbean. Willie was too young to be a player, but his heart was set on being a spectator. Now Saturday, being a holiday, was an "auld jaicket day," so on the Friday evening, with the hesitation begotten of great anxiety, he pleaded with his aunt that on the morrow he might wear his school-jacket. His request was refused in a torrent of words. The old woman might have been haranguing a multitude, instead of a timid, heart-sore little lad. "Did onybody ever hear the like? Sic wastry! Wantin' tae wear yer guid claes on a Setterday. It's a doon-richt wicked bit o' extravagance. Na, na! Wullie. Ye'll juist pit on yer auld jaicket. It fits ye fine sin' I pit a bit in the back."

Willie bit his lip to keep back his tears.

"But please, auntie," he pleaded, "there's a cricket-match, an' a' the ither boys wull hae their guid claes on."

"That mak's nae difference tae me. Setterday's aye an auld jaicket day, cricket-match or

no. The dominie says ye're an example tae a' the boys as a scholar; ye should be prood tae be an example o' economy as weel."

Willie tried further argument; but in vain. His aunt would not yield. "Setterday's an' auld jaicket day, an' there's an end o't." And, she shut her mouth firmly.

It was long before Willie fell asleep that night. The morrow, to which he had looked forward so eagerly, was already a day of dread. He buried his head under the blankets, and fought with his tears. The taunts of the Dalbean boys did not matter. He was used to them now; but the Whinburn boys would laugh at him, and the thought was more than he could bear.

When morning came he sprang out of bed. Auntie or no, he would put on his school jacket, and defy her wrath. But the door of the press was locked—he had never known it to be locked before—and the key was in the old woman's pocket. His old jacket hung ready over a chair. The joy of the day was over, before the day had well begun.

All morning he hung about the house, but when dinner was over his aunt ordered him out. Saturday was her "reddin' up day," and she could not get on with her work "wi' a big lump o' a lad in the wey." Her tongue was crueller than her heart; the trouble was she had forgotten what it was to be a child.

So Willie slipped out by the back door, and, as one with a crime on his conscience, stole,

under the shadow of the hedges and by back paths that he knew well, into the Glen Wood. Unseen himself, he saw the wagonette, packed with boys, bowling along the Whinburn road and, far off, he heard the welcoming cheer of the lads of Dalbean. He went deeper into the wood, and deeper still, with none to company him but his own sore heart. Then he sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree and buried his face in his hot little hands. He was too angry for tears. His aunt was a cruel old woman! He hated her, as he hated the jacket. He sprang up and tore the offending garment off, and flung it from him. Then he ran and, picking it up, hung it on the low branch of a tree. There he stoned it with stones, hurled turf and broken branches at it, reviled it with ugly names, and when his wild anger had passed sat down on the tree-trunk and sobbed as though his heart would break.

He did not see her coming. He was unaware of her till she spoke. Standing before him, a dainty figure in her blue dress, with bare feet and bare arms browned by the sun, she might have been an elf from fairyland, so sweet she looked.

“What are ye greetin’ for, Willie?”

Like all timid children he lied unthinkingly:

“I’m no’ greetin’.”

He looked defiantly through his tears into the brown eyes of Mary Wilson, the prettiest girl in Dalbean. He knew her well enough, though she had never spoken to him before. She was a year

older than himself, and in the class above him at school.

She smiled at his troubled face, her ripe red lips curving delicately, her eyes full of light.

"What for are ye no' at the cricket?" she asked. "A' the boys are there but you."

Willie fought a rising sob manfully. His throat rose and fell—he could not speak.

And Mary, looking from the shirt-sleeved boy to the patched and worn old jacket hanging on a tree near by, knew suddenly and poignantly the cause of Willie's tears. Her own bright eyes grew dim, and the holy spark of motherhood that lies in the heart of all her sex flamed up within her. She dropped on her knees before the boy and, putting her warm arms round him, kissed him tenderly full on the lips. Then she sprang up and, with a little cry as of a frightened bird, she darted away and soon was lost among the trees.

Willie's heart was beating wildly, he knew not why. No arms had ever enfolded him before; no lips had ever kissed his till now, and yet memory whispered that somewhere, some time, other arms had caressed him, other lips had kissed him—when he did not know. He did not remember his mother, or the mystery would have been plain.

He dried his tears; and, as the petals of a rose when the sun goes down fold themselves over its perfumed chalice, the bruised heart of

this little lad closed softly over the fragrance of Mary's sweet kiss.

III

To Willie Sproule the memory of Mary's kiss was a holy one, not to be invoked save in the hour of great need. For the most part it lay hidden in his heart in a fragrant chamber. But when his sky was darkened, when his aunt was dour and cross, or when the boys teased him, or the "nesty buddies" of an older age spoke thoughtless and unkind words about his "jaicket," he thought of it and was brave again.

If Mary remembered, she gave no sign; and by and by she passed out of his life, when her father and mother moved to the other side of Whinburn. But she had left behind her in Willie's heart a memory that was like a blessing, a memory that was yet to save him in the hour of his need.

By the time Willie was fifteen he had learned all the dominie could teach him. The dominie knew it, though Willie did not. "The boy's a genius," he confided to the smith, "an' he has socked me as dry as a bane. I can teach him nae mair."

The smith scratched his chin with his thumb. Like every Scot he had a reverence for education. "Wullie maun hae a chance," he said. "He'll bring credit tae Dalbean."

"He'll bring credit tae me," answered the

dominie testily. "A lot Dalbean has dune for him."

"Aye! the credit will be yours, dominie; but the bairn maun hae his chance. I suppose he'll gang tae the College?"

"That's my intention," answered the dominie; "an' Dalbean can help there. His aunt, puir wumman, has nae siller; but there's plenty in Dalbean, though little enough in my pocket."

"Hoo muckle wull it tak'?" asked the smith, moved by a spirit of generosity. "I'm wullin' tae help."

"I kent ye would, Sam'l; an' I'll no' ask ye for muckle, but I'll gladly tak' twa poun'."

"But that winna gang far."

"No! but it'll help. The auld Kirk minister has promised five; I'll gi'e three masel'; an' that'll mak' ten."

"But ye canna send a lad tae College wi' nocht but ten poun'," said the smith sceptically.

"Mony a Scots lad has gane wi' less; but if he has ten poun' tae start him, an' a' the coontless wealth I've pit intae his heid, he'll mak' his wey." There was a proud ring in the dominie's voice.

The smith looked puzzled. "Ten poun' micht start him wi' claes an' things; but a college education costs money."

"Man, Sam'l!" answered the dominie, "dae ye think I dinna ken whit I'm talkin' about? A lad like yon will win a bursary; he'll turn the wealth I've pit in his heid intae

guid poun' notes. He'll win through on his ain merits—and mine."

"I see!" said the smith.

So Willie was given a chance. The smiddy rose to the occasion. The smith laid bare the dominie's scheme to his familiars on a Monday night, and Ezra Snubb, the wright, not to be outdone in generosity by Sam'l Delap, said:

"I'll mak' him a kist. He'll need ane for his books an' claes."

Peter Strang, who had recently found his soul, exclaimed:

"An' I'll dae something tae feed him. I'll gie him a seck o' meal, an' a firkin' o' saut butter, forbye twa tins o' treacle; he'll no' be tae peety wi' sic provender."

And Willie Shed, the cynic, squeaked:

"I'll gie him a poun' masel', an' if he dies o' high thinkin' an' puir feedin', Peter, I micht rise tae a tombstane."

Jamie Kerr straightened his lean shoulders, and pursed his leathern lips.

"I micht manage anither poun' for him," he said; while Davie Miller, his hand still protecting the small of his back, faltered:

"I haena muckle tae spare; but he micht become a meenister, an' I'd like tae help, so I'll buy him a pair o' shoon."

Having laid his plans, and having plotted thus to help the lad, the dominie broke the news to Willie one evening in early July.

“ We’re sendin’ ye tae the College, Wullie—tae Edinburgh.”

The boy started. He had dreamed of this ; but he had long since crushed the hope from his heart. His dark eyes went suddenly dim. His lips trembled. He looked at the hard, lined face of the dominie, who was nervously tugging his straggling moustache. In his eyes, through his own quick tears, he saw a light he had never seen before. Then, without speaking, he turned quickly and went to the window. The sky was red with the sprinkled blood of the setting sun. The red softened to rose, the rose melted into gold. It was a symbol, and the boy’s heart leaped within him. He brushed away his tears. The dominie’s hand, firm but kindly, was on his shoulder. The dominie spoke, very tenderly :

“ I’ve watched ye, Wullie ; I’ve loved ye, lad ; an’ I ken.”

Tremulously the boy answered—“ Oh, dominie ! ” It was all that he could say.

The three months that followed were strenuous ones for the dominie and for Willie. The dominie was determined that no effort on his part should be spared to give his favourite pupil a chance to shine in the Bursary Examination. So day by day during the holidays he would take Willie off to the hills, where, a “ piece ” in their pockets against the onslaught of hunger, they would lie among the heather and make ready for the ordeal in October

“Let’s mak’ shure if the foundations are weel-laid,” the dominie would say, as they revised in daily reiteration the Latin and Greek Grammars, and the elements of mathematics.

“The multiplication table is a soun’ foundation frae which ye may build up tae the higher mathematics; so come on, Willie—what’s twelve times thirteen?” And so it went on day after day during the vacation, and night after night when the school had assembled again and there were other demands on the dominie’s time.

Willie’s extraordinary memory and his quickness of perception served him well. There was no verb, regular or irregular, in the Greek Grammar which the boy could not conjugate, and he had an uncanny gift of recalling in an instant any special aberration among the most irregular of the irregular verbs, so that, book in hand and steel-rimmed spectacles on nose, the dominie had, many a time, to search carefully to confirm some statement of which Willie was absolutely sure. And Willie was never wrong.

“I tell ye he’s a genius,” the dominie whispered to his friends.

At last the day came in late September when Willie set out on the great adventure. The dominie dismissed the school an hour earlier than his wont, and betook himself to the station at Whinburn to speed his pupil. Willie’s aunt had stayed at home; so for the last few minutes the dominie had the boy to himself. Willie was calm outwardly—but inwardly all aglow.

The dominie was as fidgety—so the station-master said, who had an eye upon them—“as a hen on a hot girdle.”

Boy and man, they walked up and down the platform till the train came in.

“Did Peter Strang min’ tae send ye yon seck o’ meal?” asked the dominie—and he was not content till he had seen it with his own eyes, resting beside Willie’s box. “An’ ye’ve got the richt label on the box?” he added, adjusting his spectacles to examine it. “An’ hae ye got yer money safe?”

“Yes!” answered Willie, “it’s sewn up in a special pooch inside my waistcoat.”

“Weel, tak’ care o’t. There’s lots o’ pick-pockets in Edinburgh.”

The dominie began to bite his nails. “Ye’re shure ye ken yer irregular verbs? Yon Professors are awfu’ fond o’ irregular verbs! they leeve on them. That’s what makes them queer i’ the heid.”

Willie laughed. He knew the dominie was trying to be humorous to hide some deeper feeling.

The train rattled in and drew up quickly. The dominie sought an empty carriage, and thrust Willie in.

“Weel, ye’ll be awa’ in a meenite!” Willie saw tears in the dominie’s eyes. “Ye’ll no forget!—juist rin owre some o’ the fundamentals in yer min’ afore ye gang intae the Examination Hall.”

Willie promised faithfully.

"An' look up the speech o' Pericles again—they're fond o't in examinations, because they dinna ken hoo tae translate it theirsel's, an' they aye leeve in hope that some bricht lad like you, taught by a dominie like me"—and the dominie brushed his tears away—"micht be able to throw some licht on it for them."

Willie laughed.

"An' yon bit in Homer—aboot the Isle o' Calypso—ye micht get that."

The whistle blew. The dominie seized Willie's hand. "Weel, guid luck an' God bless ye. An'—an'——" and the dominie began to run along the platform as the train began to move—"if ye dinna get a bursary, I'm danged if I dinna see ye through the College masel'."

The train was gathering speed; the station-master was shouting to the dominie, still racing alongside, still holding his pupil's hand, to stand clear.

"I wull, lad! for ye're worth it."

Panting, the dominie let the boy's hand go—and as Willie waved his farewell there came to him through the trumpet of the dominie's palms the message—"Dinna forget, the first aorist (Attic form) of *καίω* is *ἔκαε*. They micht ask ye."

So Willie embarked on his great adventure, and found himself next morning a forlorn little figure, a little conscious of his uncouth clothing, and very conscious of his heavy country boots,

pacing, with several hundred other boys from all the schools of Scotland, along the grey stone terraces of the University. At five minutes to nine the doors of the Examination Hall were thrown open and the crowd surged in.

For three long days the ordeal lasted, and at the end of it Willie wrote to the dominie. The papers had been hard, but he thought he had done well; though he feared that as most of the other students seemed older than himself his chances of a bursary were poor.

During the three days of the examination all the pupils in the school at Dalbeane cursed Willie Sproule heartily; and not without reason. The dominie was beside himself with excitement and fidgetiness, and the tawse descended mercilessly and without discrimination on the palms of the just and the unjust.

But Willie's letter brought him to a more reasonable temper. He read it and re-read it; and read it over again, and at night he sat down and wrote to Willie.

"If you think you have done well," he wrote, "I know you have done well; and I have no fear of the result. God bless ye, lad"—and then he lapsed into the language of the village and wrote—"If the Professors dinna ken a guid lad when they see aye, I dae! an' if ye miss a bursary, I'll see ye through masel'."

But all doubts were set at rest ten days later on a Friday afternoon. A telegram came from Willie—"Successful! placed first on list," and

the dominie went out of his mind. He announced the triumph of his pupil to the school, and dismissed the cheering pupils on the instant. He raced round to the Manse and brandished the telegram before the astonished minister's eyes; he sought Sam'l Delap, and Willie Shed, and Jamie Kerr, and all the sponsors of his pupil; and he shouted, "First in a' Scotland! Weel dune, Willie Sproule! weel dune me!—I kent it was in him!" And he rushed into Peter Strang's shop, and shoved the telegram under that stern Cameronian's nose.

"First in a' Scotland!" he cried.

"What's first in a' Scotland? Whit dae ye mean?" asked the grocer.

"I am—I mean Wullie Sproule is! see there!"—and he tapped the flimsy paper with his fingers.

"That's great, dominie!" said Peter.

"Aye! it's greater than great!" shouted the dominie as he helped himself to five "brandy snaps" from the open box on the counter, and thrust two into his mouth. Then he rushed out, and Peter made a note on the slate behind the door—"October 14th—one-quarter snaps—the dominie."

But the dominie was "neither to haud nor bind" when on the Saturday morning he received a letter from Willie full of gratitude, and wonderfully humble, saying that he had won a bursary of eighty pounds for four years, and attributing all his success to his old master. And there was

another letter, which was the last straw. It came from the Professor of Greek, and offered his very hearty congratulations—

“on the success of William Sproule, who is, I understand, one of your pupils. The paper he submitted in my subject was at once the most accurate and brilliant that I remember ever to have been submitted in an Entrance Scholarship Examination; and I am assured by my colleague, the Professor of Humanity, that Mr. Sproule did equally well in his subject. I shall watch his career with interest.”

It was too much for the dominie. He showed the letter to the minister and the smith. He walked through Dalbean like one possessed, so that Willie Shed shook his head and squeaked—“The dominie’s gane gyte”—and he retired to bed at noon with two bottles of whisky. Judge him not harshly. It was his first lapse in twenty years—his first since drink had driven him out of the Kirk.

Great emotions move different people in different ways. Willie’s aunt, hard-visaged and soured, had been melted to tears by the letter Willie had sent her. He had told her of his marvellous good fortune, and he had ended a warm and affectionate letter by saying: “I’ll never need eighty pounds a year to see me through; so when I get it I’ll send you ten pounds all to yourself.” So that night she waled

her portion with special care and read aloud in her lonely kitchen, with none but God to hear, the hundred and third Psalm.

IV

Willie's career at the University was one long succession of triumphs. His reputation survived long after he had graduated, and the brilliance of a student was measured in terms of "Willie Sproule."

"Armstrong's a very remarkable student," the wise-acres would say—"but so far his record is nothing to Sproule's. *He* was a marvel."

"Which Sproule do you mean?" someone would ask.

"There was and is only one Sproule," the wise-acres would answer. "He's minister of St. Jude's—or is it St. John's?—now."

He took his degree with the highest honours, and then, for no more substantial reason than that he loved the classics and was desirous of studying Hebrew, he decided to become a minister, and entered the Divinity Hall.

In this his aunt saw a definite answer to her prayers, and thanked God on her knees, incidentally calling the attention of the Almighty to the fact that she herself had instructed the boy in sound doctrine from an early age, and had taught him his catechism.

In the Divinity Hall Willie continued his career of meteoric brilliance, carrying everything

before him, and at the end of his four years' course he emerged with a "Travelling Scholarship."

This took him to Berlin, where he continued his theological studies, and while he was there his aunt died. When he heard of her death he wept a little, for, in spite of the painful memories that clung to his "auld jaicket," he knew how much he owed to her self-denial. And he sent instructions to Willie Shed to erect a worthy tombstone over her grave, and enclosed an inscription to be carved upon it.

Now at the time he was studying in Berlin there was a ferment in the theological world. Men were beginning to apply to the things of faith what they were pleased to call the methods of science. They were taking nothing for granted; they were subjecting everything to "acid tests," and sometimes when they looked into their test-tubes after they had added their acids they found the things of faith had disappeared. They were too blind to know that the "things of faith," being impalpable and divine, cannot be put into a test-tube at all. Men only imagine they can put them there. Be it said to Willie's credit, and to the credit of the aunt who had grounded him in the catechism, he revolted against this rude handling of things he had been brought up to regard as more than sacred, and he shuddered with a cold and ghastly horror when he heard a Professor speak of the central fact of the Christian religion as "the

Jesus Myth." It was all, said the Professor, a fanciful story ; a mere development from heathen religions.

In his room that night, pipe in mouth and feet tilted up against the square brick column of the stove, Willie Sproule took his bearings. What did he believe ? What did his religion mean to him ? Was the Professor right, or had intellect, unhallowed by faith, led him into a morass of unbelief ? The fight in his soul was long and fierce, and he ended it on his knees. He rose with his faith quickened, for the hand of God had touched him.

Three months later he was back in Scotland—a probationer—a candidate for a Kirk. He had not long to wait for " a call." Scholarly, gifted with eloquence, and of striking appearance—his dark eyes flashing in his pale face—he was the type of man who appeals to a congregation in a land where a sermon, well delivered and with some body in it, is regarded as the hall-mark of a good minister. St. Jude's gave him a hearing, and, having heard him and picked his sermons to pieces and found them to be of good body, free from the taint of heresy, they " called him."

For six faithful years he laboured, and St. Jude's became filled to overflowing. Willie's preaching appealed to the intellectual in virtue of its culture and scholarship ; but it appealed also to those whose religion is of their hearts rather than of their heads because of the poetry in it. He laboured faithfully, and was greatly

beloved. And he, in his turn, loved his work and his people. But in the seventh year of his ministry a strange and insidious change came over him. He began to dislike his people, and to loathe his work.

His antipathy to his people had its root in a sudden aversion he developed towards a beautiful fur coat worn by a lady who sat in the fourth pew, right in his line of vision when he stood up in the pulpit. She was rich, and a great admirer of her minister and, therefore, very regular in her church attendance. And every time he rose to preach Willie's eyes leaped, as though fascinated, to that fur coat. The thought in his mind was "though the Son of Man had not where to lay His head some of His professing followers can spend on their own adornment what would clothe a hundred naked children"; and his gorge rose. He hated the luxurious garment, and his hatred spread from her apparel to the wearer. There it concentrated for a time, then as week after week he looked round the crowded pews his hatred widened, for there were others dressed as richly, and he began by hating their clothes;—he ended by hating the people who wore them.

If Willie Sproule were living to-day he would find many ready enough to explain his malady. With a knowledge of his history they would trace all his antipathies to his own early experiences. They would talk wisely of "complexes" and "repressions" and "invisible lesions buried

in the subconscious " and much jargon of that kind, and after digging with inquisitive spades into the deep recesses of his mind they would unearth an " auld jaicket," and would doubtless write learned papers, copiously documented, on " The Jacket Complex." But—and we may perhaps emit a fervent " Thank God ! "—there were no psycho-analysts in Scotland in Willie Sproule's day.

Now when hatred of what a man has held dear enters his heart it tends to spread like a fire. So it was in Willie's case. He hated his people ; he began to distrust the Message he had pledged himself to give them. When doubt began to assail him, he fought it sternly ; but it returned. The words of the German Professor " the Jesus Myth " hammered constantly at the door of his heart : and another evil influence was at work. His dearest friend was a dabbler in the sciences, named Frazer. He was a " doubter "—and boasted of it, though he attended St. Jude's occasionally. " Not," he said, " my boy, in any hope that by so doing I may become a brand plucked from the burning, but because I like the music—and I have a sneaking admiration for your flowery eloquence, and envy your power of hypnotising with the soporifics of religion hard-headed men and emotional women." Many a time, over a pipe, Willie had whetted his own mind against the keen edge of his friend's. Frazer was cynical, keen, analytical, an interpreter of motives.

"What," he asked Willie once, "do you regard as the greatest gift Christianity has made to life?" And the minister had answered fervently—"Love!"

The cynic laughed. "My dear chap," he said, "what is love? In the last analysis it is nothing but self-interest. Why does a woman love a man? For a home and creature comforts most often! And a man a woman? Self-interest again: a desire to continue his own physical existence at second-hand in his children, which is probably the only shadow of immortality he'll succeed in grasping; or a wish to be taken care of and made comfortable in his old age by a capable woman. Love of children for parents?—self-interest again! Love of parents for children!—Nothing more than selfish pride! That form of love known as altruism? Nothing more than a desire to experience self-approval. Love is an evolutionary development which has survived and grown, because it was of value to the race. Christianity had nothing to do with its inception—though religion seized on it as a pretty bauble. And how you Christians love each other! Why, most of you are prepared to send everyone to perdition who does not approve of your particular ritual or form of church government. Love, as you parsons preach it, Sproule, is mere tosh; and if your religion has made no greater contribution to life than that, it's worth nothing!"

Willie argued keenly, cleverly; but Frazer

laughed. "I like you, William, my son, but I cannot understand how a man with your intellect can stomach all the fables of your religion—mere old wives' tales."

This was only one of the many discussions that took place between the two men, and in the hour of his vacillation Willie remembered them all. He spent many sleepless nights fighting his battle—and, at last, doubt won.

He sought out Frazer. "I've come to your opinion, Frazer. The whole thing's a myth. It's not love, but reason that is the greatest thing in the world. It is not love, but reason that has ennobled man. Reason has made for his progress; reason has begotten fair dealing between man and man; created the civilisation we enjoy; given to man that dynamic which has enabled him to rise from lowly to higher things. Love is weakness; reason is strength."

Frazer blew a couple of smoke-rings. "If you've come to that conclusion, my son, you'll have to come out of the Kirk. I know you're too honest to preach one thing and believe another."

"Yes, I see that," answered Willie, "and my mind is made up. Next Sabbath evening I shall preach a sermon declaring my belief, and immediately afterwards I shall ask to be relieved of my charge."

"Bravo!" said Frazer. "I'll be there to hear you. I love honesty."

For the next few days Willie was an unhappy

man, and never more unhappy than on Saturday when he sat down to write his sermon. As a rule he composed easily, his thoughts flowing steadily along the current of his words. But on this day neither thoughts nor words would come. Twenty times he began, and twenty times he tore his effort up. He pulled down from their shelves book after book, and heaped them like a rampart on his study table; but he found no inspiration in any of them. He paced up and down the floor; he smoked viciously; but five o'clock came and inspiration still eluded him. On the stroke of the hour his housekeeper entered with his tea-tray, for on Saturday he always took tea in his study. She set the tray on a table by the fire and went out. As she passed it, her eye fell suspiciously and with disapproval on the study table, and its pile of books. She whispered to herself: "Maister Sproule is makin' nae progress wi' his sermon the day. He'll be gie'in us an auld ane the morn! I howp the man's no' ill. He smokes far owre muckle"—and she closed the door gently.

As he took his tea Willie picked up the two letters that lay on the tray and, opening them, read them. Both were begging letters, for causes of which he did not approve, so he tore them up and dropped them into the fire. Then he picked up the *Whinburn Gazette*, which came to him every week—for he liked to have news of his old country-side—and ripped off the wrapper.

He recharged his pipe and, pushing the tea-tray away, sat back in his chair and began to run through the news. In half an hour he had gleaned all there was of interest; but before laying the paper down he turned to the front page. His eye caught the column of Births and Marriages and Deaths, and ran down it quickly. None of the names were familiar to him but the last, and as he read memory surged over him in a flood :

WILSON. On the 19th inst. at Poolbank, near Whinburn, aged 32, Mary, the beloved daughter of Peter Wilson.

“ As a flower of the field.”

Mary Wilson dead ! The years slipped off his shoulders and Willie Sproule was a little boy again,—a timid little lad, crying on a tree-stump, with a hated old patched jacket hung on a tree near by. The eyes of the man filled with tears. An old deep chamber in his heart threw wide its doors and a fragrant memory trembled forth. And the man who had become a boy again felt with a boy's lips two soft warm lips pressed tenderly upon his own, felt the warm arms of a loving child thrown comfortingly round him.

The minister rose from his chair, and stood before the fire with a foot on the fender. He raised his eyes to the beautiful copy of the Sistine Madonna that hung above the mantelpiece, and from the eyes of the Mother he saw love

shine forth like a star. He stood long in thought before the picture, with the paper still in his hand. Then he sank on his knees beside the chair and buried his face. When he rose at last there was triumph in his eyes. He looked at the newspaper again, and then up at the Madonna. Then he seated himself at his table and picked up his pen. An hour later he laid it down, his sermon completed. He read it over again slowly; then reverently, as though he were rending a sacred thing, he tore it up and dropped the pieces in the fire. The glowing words were graven on his soul; on the morrow the written word would be naught but a hindrance.

When morning came he sent a message to Frazer. "I shall expect to see you in your place to-night," he wrote, and when he climbed into the pulpit for the evening service he saw him sitting in his accustomed seat beside a pillar. There was an eager look on his face as though he hoped to hear great things. And he did—though not the things he expected.

The psalms, the lesson, and the prayers were over. The great congregation settled itself down, with little rustlings and furtive coughs, and here and there a fluttering page overturned. The minister rose. The pulpit light shone on his pale face, in which his dark eyes flashed like twin flames. One moment, and that vast assembly was in the hollow of his hand. The stillness was as death; and for half an hour the congregation was spell-bound. Here and there

a woman wept gently—the tears trickling unhindered down her cheeks; and men, who would never have admitted it, felt their eyes grow dim. Even Frazer, the cynic, who was hearing far other words than he had expected, felt the glamour of his eloquence. For Willie was preaching on Love—the unfathomable Love of God, the greatest thing in the world. His beautiful voice rang out in triumph with his closing words:

“And now abideth Faith, Hope, Love—these three; but the greatest of these is Love.”

The congregation dispersed slowly, almost in silence, still under the spell of the great declaration of faith to which they had listened. Outside they found their voices. “The greatest sermon he has ever preached,” said this one and that; and some of the women whispered to their husbands—
“That man has seen God.”

No one but Frazer, and he only in part, ever knew the fierce battle with doubt which Willie had fought and won. He won it by the grace of God; but God’s minister had been a little barefoot lass who, hardly knowing what she did, had, in innocence and love, kissed a broken-hearted little lad twenty years before in the cool shadow of the wood above Dalbean.

XV

TWO OLD SOLDIERS

ABOUT a mile from Dalbean, set on a hill-side and almost hidden by the pine woods that girt it about, stood the Castle. In summer-time, when the woods were in full foliage, it was sometimes difficult to pick out its grey turrets against their dark background. In winter, when all but the fir-trees had shed their leaves, the turrets and the upper storey were visible from Dalbean. The rest was hidden ; but the high-road to Whinburn, as it wound over the hill, let you see over the tree-tops, and you could catch a glimpse of the great level lawn, the well-kept flower-beds, and the gravelled drive sweeping out of the wood in a gentle curve to the broad steps that led up to the pillared doorway.

The Castle was the home of the Laird. Now there are lairds and lairds. There is the laird who, having amassed great wealth in commerce, seeks to establish a territorial family by purchase. To such a laird, who has none of the traditions of the country-side in his blood, and who is usually a stickler for his pound of flesh, his tenants render lip-service only. He rarely

secures the full allegiance of their hearts. But the laird who is laird by right of blood is a laird indeed. He may have faults, but his tenants are charitable, for is he not the sixth of his line who has owned the estate? And his greatest faults are virtues, in their judgment, compared with the business-like methods with which the "incomer" by purchase seeks to assert his lordship and to bring the country-side into line with the city.

Acre-end, in the smiddy, once put the matter to Sam'l Delap in this wise. They had been talking of an estate on the far side of Whinburn that had recently changed hands.

"There's twa kin' o' lairds, Sam'l—them that buys theirsels in, and them that are lairds by a kin' o' divine richt. I ken the kin' I'd rather sit under."

"Umphm, Acre-end!" answered Sam'l; "they may buy the land, but they canna buy the richt—that's something in the bluid that's never hawked in the market."

"Aye; an' them that buys theirsels in never ken hoo tae regaird the land. They look on't as sae muckle wealth—a guid investment if ye like; but the rale kin' o' laird, like Sir Robert, looks on the land as a bairn—a somethin' gi'en him in trust by the Almichty tae dae weel by, an' no' spoil or mishandle, but tae lo'e it as though it had a sowl."

"Wha kens it hasna?" asked Sam'l, for which bold suggestion he was taken to task by

Peter Strang, who had come the moment before to have his bacon knife sharpened.

"Sam'l," he said, "ye're a heathen! Is that the kin' o' doctrine they're teachin' in the Auld Kirk? A' the Kirks but the Cameronian are fair stinkin' wi' heresy! Sowls in trees, an' hills, an' fields! Man, I'm ashamed tae hear ye speak! Sowls are things reserved for human beings, Sam'l. The beasts o' the field, an' far less the fields they feed in, can hae nane."

"Are ye shure, Peter?" boomed the smith. "I ken some men in Dalbean that hae less richt tae a sowl than their dog has."

"I'm wi' ye there, Sam'l. That's so!" interrupted Acre-end firmly.

Peter ran his thumb carefully along the edge of his bacon-knife. Perhaps he felt tempted to let some of the heretical blood out of Sam'l, but the smith went on unperturbed:

"An' I'd liefer think that a guid field, that returns a hunnerfold the seed that was gi'en it in trust, has a sowl than a man wha was born wi' talents an' threw them a' awa'. Let's see yer gully, Peter."

Peter handed him the knife, and the three men went outside to the grindstone. Above the hissing rasp of stone on steel Peter's voice made itself heard:

"Fields an' trees hae sowls! Guidsakes! Sam'l, you an' Acre-end wad feel quite at hame amang the cannibals that ate Joe Kilsyth. Yer theology's aboot on a level wi' theirs."

“ Ach ! haud yer wheesht, Peter, an’ ca’ the grindstone steady, or I’ll never get an edge on this bit o’ pot-metal ! ” And the conversation which, like many another in the smiddy, true to the Dalbean tradition, had begun on the earth and ended in the nebulous atmosphere of the metaphysical, came sharply to an end.

Our laird, Colonel Sir Robert Venters, was a laird by right of blood. His forefathers had lived in the Castle before a stone of Dalbean had been laid. A Venters had built it, and successive generations of the family had been born, had lived, and died within its walls. And some that were born there had died afar—one with Marlborough in Flanders, one in the Peninsula, one at Waterloo, another on the Afghan frontier, and before the dying eyes of each there passed a vision of kindly grey towers and turreted gables set against the green of Scots firs. And, seeing it, they shed a dying tear, but died content.

Sir Robert was a tall, spare man who carried no needless flesh. He had blue eyes, brindled hair, and a grey moustache. He had never lost the tan which the Indian sun had burned into his skin, nor the quick irascibility which it had grafted upon his temper. But he was kind of heart, and he was laird by right of blood, and therefore he was a laird beloved. And with reason, for the interests of his tenants were his own interests. So long as a farmer did right by the land, and looked after his fences and hedges, he had no need to worry about his

tenancy. He would not be displaced to make room for some higher bidder, and when he died his son would have first claim upon the lease. And if misfortune, through no fault of his own, should befall a tenant, his best friend was the Laird. Stories were told of how he had waived his claims to rent for a whole year in more than one case where disaster, through failure of crops, or loss of cattle, had befallen a tenant. Among Acre-end's most precious possessions was a laconic note from the Laird which read: "A just laird should share the burdens of a good tenant." It had come to Acre-end with a cheque for fifty pounds the day after he paid his rent in the year of the great snow-storm when seventy of his sheep were lost. But though the Laird could be generous he could be severe: and he was the terror of the slovenly farmer who lacked a due sense of what he owed to the earth. The blue eyes of the Colonel would glint like steel, and he would pull irritably at his iron-grey moustache; and those husbandmen, to whom John Bunyan would have given the titles "Mr. Starve-the-soil," or "Mr. Spare-weeds," would tremble for their leases. To his tenants he was "The Laird." His military and civil titles were as nothing to them compared with his lairdship. To him his tenants were George, or Andrew, or William—each known by his Christian name; or he would address them—which pleased them most—by the name of the farm they occupied, as Harleyknowe, Acre-end, Laigh Kirkton,

Whitehills, or Drumwhat. Beloved he was, but by none more than his loyal servitor, Davie Gauld.

Davie had served with the Colonel in India. As a private he had been for a time his batman, and it was then the Colonel learned to appreciate his worth. When the old Laird died and Sir Robert succeeded to the estates he had secured the discharge of Davie, who, by that time, had attained to the rank of sergeant. So Davie became part and parcel of the Castle: he had long before become an essential part of the Colonel. His wife had died in India, leaving a small son to her husband's care; and when Davie took up his abode in the lodge at the Castle gate he sent for the boy, who had been committed, at an early age, to the keeping of Davie's unmarried sister. His aunt brought the boy, and found it so hard to part with him that she could not do so, but, instead, settled with Davie in the grey, creeper-clad cottage with its diamonded windows at the Castle gate. Though it was long before Davie would admit it, this invasion was to his benefit, for his sister looked after his home with care and was the devoted bond-slave of her sturdy nephew. Dalbean first knew him as a sunburnt, round-faced man of stocky build, with sandy hair, and sandy side-whiskers which were always kept neatly trimmed, with their lower border cut straight as a line of soldiers on parade. He had a strong lower jaw which had made him respected by the men under him; but his lips were mobile and his

quick eyes were playful, so that he gave the impression of good fellowship. He carried himself well, as an old soldier should, with chest thrown out and back straight as a ramrod; and his character was as straight as his back, as the Colonel knew. At the Castle he was, primarily, the Colonel's personal servant; but as time went on and changes in the staff occurred his duties began to be as varied as his capabilities were wide. Indoors he performed some of the functions of a butler—cleaning the plate, waiting at table, keeping a wise eye upon the cellar. Out-of-doors he was the instructor and counsellor of the young folk. He taught Miss Margery to ride, and when, later, she hunted in the shires she was known as a graceful and fearless rider who would face any jump that her horse would take. "Margery Venters is a wonder," they said: "she rides straight like a man." That was Davie's doing, for many a time he had told her, "A jump in the field's like a trouble in life. Ye'll win owre it best if ye gang straicht for't"—a precept that she found of value elsewhere than in the chase. And he instructed Master Robert in the arts of fishing and shooting and the care of a gun. And, in addition, he made her ladyship's small conservatory his own especial care. This led to some friction with the gardener till the Colonel intervened.

To the Colonel, Davie was all loyalty and meticulous respect. That was one of the fruits of army discipline. To her ladyship and the

children he was all loyalty but sometimes scant in ceremony. For the privileged servant, if a loyal Scot, is prone to assert his manhood by expressing his own opinion—sometimes brusquely enough. Her ladyship used often to tell, with her silvery laugh, how he had carried his point when there had been a difference of opinion between them :

“Yer leddyship can gang yer ain gait if ye like, but if ye’ve ony sense in yer heid ye’ll listen tae reason.”

It sounded rude, but it was not intended to be so ; nor did her ladyship, who knew Davie, regard it in that wise. If the truth were told, she preferred Davie’s brusque independence to the servility of some of her retainers; for she knew the loyal and kindly heart that beat in his breast. She told the Colonel with glee, as she brushed her hair that night, and he, after exclaiming a startled and pungent “What!” laughed heartily ; and ever afterwards, when he wanted his own way and her ladyship wanted hers, he could win his point by quoting “Yer leddyship can gang yer ain gait if ye like, but if ye’ve ony sense in yer heid ye’ll listen tae reason.”

To the children he was indulgent, though a disciplinarian. In the last resort his threat was always “I’ll tell the Colonel on ye”—a threat that he never executed.

The children loved him, and he loved them with a love almost as great as that he kept for his own Davie.

The passage of years brought changes. The children grew up. Miss Margery married Captain Arbuthnot, and went to live in London. Master Robert entered the army, as did also young Davie. Her ladyship died, leaving the Colonel a very lonely man; and Time, laying a hand upon Davie and his master, bowed their shoulders, furrowed an extra line or two upon their faces, and powdered their scanty hair with snow. Both were old men now, bound together by the ties of common memories. In his own mind, though he never spoke of it, Davie regarded himself as a bit of the Castle; and Sir Robert found in his faithful servitor an indispensable prop and stay. Davie practised a constant but unobtrusive watchfulness over his master, and sent Miss Margery—for Mrs. Arbuthnot was always Miss Margery to him—a weekly report about her father. This was a secret compact she had with him, of which Sir Robert knew nothing. Davie was no scholar, so his messages were brief but to the point. They varied from “The Colonel’s fine.—Davie,” which assured her, to “The Colonel’s off his feed.—Davie,” which brought her north to see for herself, and to lighten for a day or two the grey old Castle with the sunshine of her presence.

They who lend their sons to the service of their country give precious hostages to Fortune. A day came when there was trouble in Egypt, and anxiety—poignant though unexpressed—

brooded over the Castle and the little creeper-clad cottage at its gate.

On an afternoon in March, when the blackbirds and the thrushes, stirred by the whispers of spring, were venturing their love-calls in the woods, the Colonel, wrapped in his heavy coat, was walking up and down the stretch of gravel in front of the Castle. His two Irish terriers raced and gambolled playfully, throwing up the gravel as they wheeled and slipped in their race. At the sound of footsteps behind him the Colonel turned. Davie was coming towards him with a telegram in his hand.

"I took it frae the boy at the lodge, Colonel. I thocht I wad bring it masel'."

The Colonel tore the envelope open and read the message. From the quick bite at his lower lip and the stiffening of his figure, Davie, watching anxiously, knew that his worst fears were confirmed. The Colonel crushed the flimsy paper in his hand, his shoulders drooped—he was an old bowed man.

"I howp, sir, the Captain's a' richt," said Davie gently, knowing the answer before it was spoken.

"Robert"—there was a tremor in the old man's voice as he spoke his son's name—"was killed in battle, two days ago."

"That's bad, sir!" And Davie shook his head. "Can I help ye intae the hoose, Colonel?"

The Colonel straightened himself. He was his own man again.

“Thank you, Davie; I can manage.” And he walked steadily but slowly across the gravel, up the steps to the door, and let himself in.

Davie watched him yearningly, and shook his head. “I ken what he’s suffering,” he whispered. “Puir Colonel!”

He called the romping terriers to heel and, slipping round to the back of the Castle, made for the housekeeper’s room.

To her he broke the news as gently as he could. When she could find voice through her tears she asked :

“How did Sir Robert take it?”

“Like a sodger and a man,” answered Davie. “But it’ll break him up.”

For years Davie had not waited at table except when the Castle had guests, but as he was leaving the housekeeper’s room he turned and said :

“I think, Mistress Deans, I’d best wait on the Colonel the nicht mase’. The table-maid can len’ a haun’ if wanted : I’ll tak’ the heavy en’.”

When, at half-past seven, the gong sounded and Sir Robert came down the oak stairs Davie was waiting in the hall. He followed his master into the dining-room.

A look of understanding passed between master and servant, and, as the Colonel dropped into his chair as his loyal henchman pushed it forward, he let his hand rest for a moment on Davie’s, as it lay upon the chair-arm.

“I take this very kindly, Davie,” he said.

Davie placed the soup before his master and noiselessly retired to his place by the sideboard.

For a moment or two there was silence ; then the Colonel spoke.

“ I forgot to ask you. I hope you have good news of your son ? ”

The answer did not come at once, but when it came it came in steady tones :

“ I had news three days sin’. He fell in action last week.”

“ Oh, Davie, Davie ! I am sorry. Why did you not tell me ere this ? ”

“ I kent, sir, ye had yer ain anxieties, an’ ye had nae need tae be troubled wi’ my sorrows.”

Only the tick of the clock broke the silence. Master and man, knight and servitor, colonel and sergeant were recognising their common humanity in the shadow of a like sorrow. A coal fell from the brazier set in the deep fireplace and glowed on the hearth. Davie crossed the room and replaced it.

“ This will make a great difference to us both, Davie.”

“ Aye !—it wull that : he was a’ I had.”

“ And he was my only son. The direct line is broken. Young Arbuthnot will be the heir.”

“ Your grandson, sir ? Weel ! ye couldna hae a better. He’s only a bairn, but he’s the very spit o’ ye, sir ; an’ ye need hae nae fear as tae his fitness. He’s Miss Margery’s wean, an’ she’s a proper leddy.”

The Colonel toyed listlessly with his fish.

"You think Master Geoffrey is like me?"

"The very spit o' ye, sir. In Dalbean they ca' him the wee laird, he's that like ye."

A smile flitted across the Colonel's worn face.

"It's good to hear that, Davie. I must make provision that he change his name to Arbuthnot-Venters."

"That's guid, sir. That'll keep up the auld tradition."

The Colonel's fork clattered on his plate.

"Confound it! I have forgotten to let Margery know. How she will blame me!"

"Ye needna worry, sir. I took it upon masel' tae send Mrs. Arbuthnot word, an' she'll be here the morn. I've had a wire frae her."

The Colonel bent his head. "Thank you, Davie. It was like you not to forget."

"I kent yer min' was occupied, an' I felt I micht tak' the liberty, Colonel. Miss Margery has aye been a frien' o' mine."

"Davie, that's a good word! My children have been your friends, you have been their friend—the Captain loved you."

"Aye sir! An' I lo'ed him. I min' learnin' him tae cast a fly: I min' learnin' him tae fire a gun. I was wi' him whan he catched his first trout, an' whan he shot his first deer. Boy an' man, I kent him through an' through. He was clean as steel."

"Like your own boy, Davie."

"Aye!—like—ma—ain—boy, Colonel." And for the first time Davie's voice was uncertain.

Sir Robert shook his head as his servant placed the next course before him, and Davie removed it again.

He set the dessert on the table and, as he took its stopper from the decanter of port, he said :

“Colonel, I’ve a favour tae ask ye.”

“What is it, Davie ? ”

“Juist oot-bye the gate o’ yer buryin’-place in the kirkyaird there’s a grass border. Wull ye let me lie there ? ”

The Colonel did not reply at once. He knew what was in Davie’s mind, and, being touched to the heart, he could not trust himself to speak.

Davie, urgent upon his request, continued :

“There’s room for a man tae lie yonder : I’ve measured it. An’ I’ll no’ spoil the look o’ yer plot by wantin’ a heidstane.”

“Davie ! ”—and the Colonel’s voice was full of a tenderness that none but her ladyship had ever heard—“your request touches me deeply. Why do you want to lie there ? ”

“I’m a lanely auld man, sir. The wife lies in India, Davie in Egypt, an’ I canna be laid wi’ my ain ; but I’d like tae lie at the feet o’ them I served an’ lo’ed while I was here.”

The Colonel raised his head. His lips were quivering. He was glad that Davie was in the shadows somewhere behind him.

“Not outside, Davie !—not outside. You shall lie within the gate.”

“Thank ye, Sir Robert ! It’s the prood man I am, but I ken ma place. Ootside is a’ I ask.”

"As you wish, Davie."

"Thank ye, Colonel! An' I'll be wi' ye at the last Revally."

"Davie!"—the Colonel's voice was wistful as a woman's.

"Aye, sir!"

"You have been a loyal servant—a true friend."

"I howp sae. I learned loyalty in the army, sir."

"No, Davie; it was in your heart. The Service only made it strong. You have proved your loyalty in a thousand ways—you have sealed it with the blood of your son."

The Colonel's thin white hand grasped the decanter.

"What is it, Davie?"

"The last bottle o' the sixty-fowre, sir."

"Bring another glass!"

Davie did so, and placed it beside the Colonel's. With a steady hand the old man filled both glasses, and set the decanter down.

Then he called Davie back out of the shadows and placed a glass in his hand. For a moment the old sergeant stood mystified. Then the Colonel rose to his feet. In the candle-light, his shoulders thrown back, his head held proudly, he looked like a man in his prime. His voice rang firmly:

"Sergeant Gauld!" he said: "The Queen!"

Davie sprang to attention, and the two old men, master and butler, knight and servitor,

